

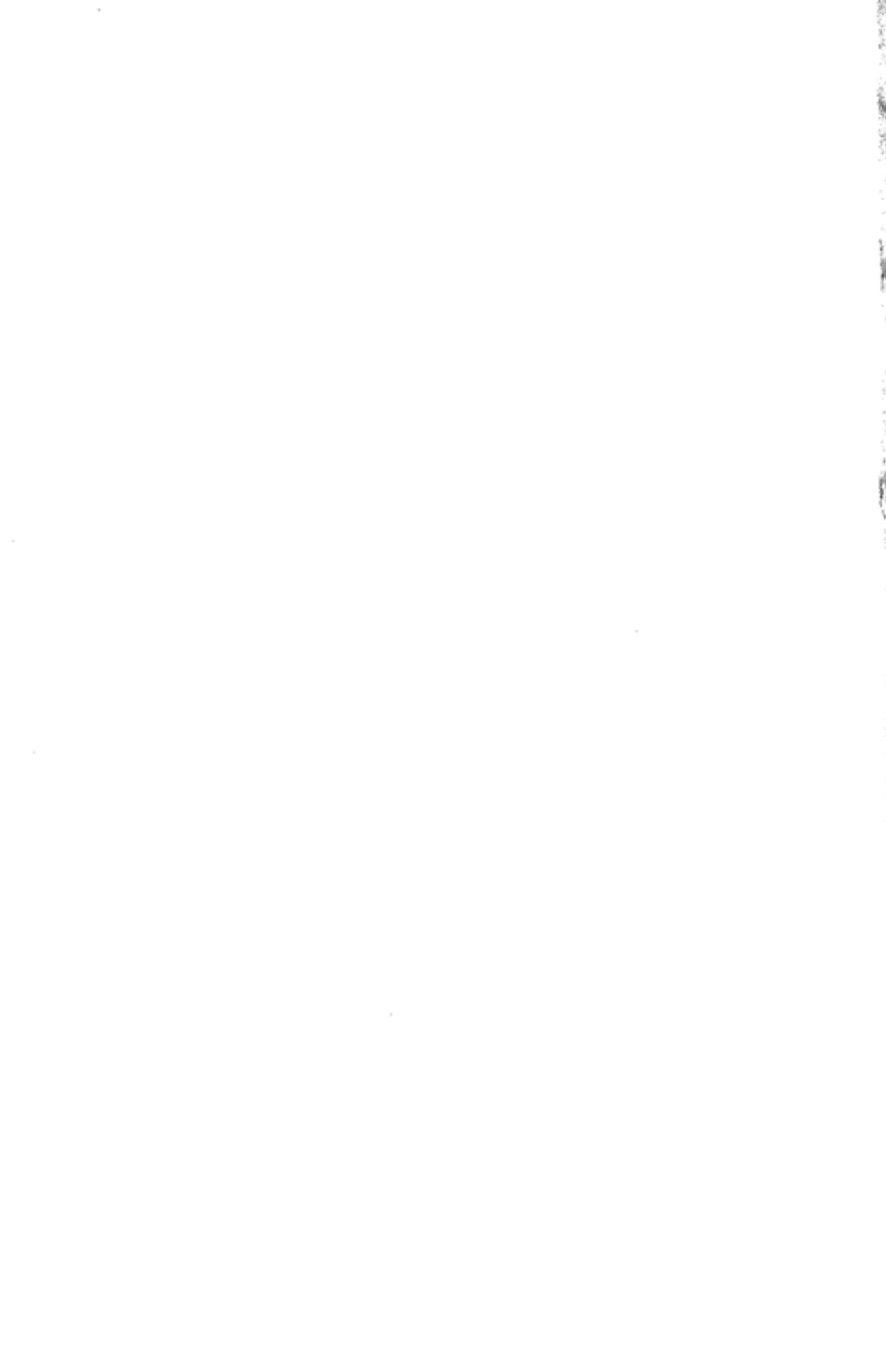
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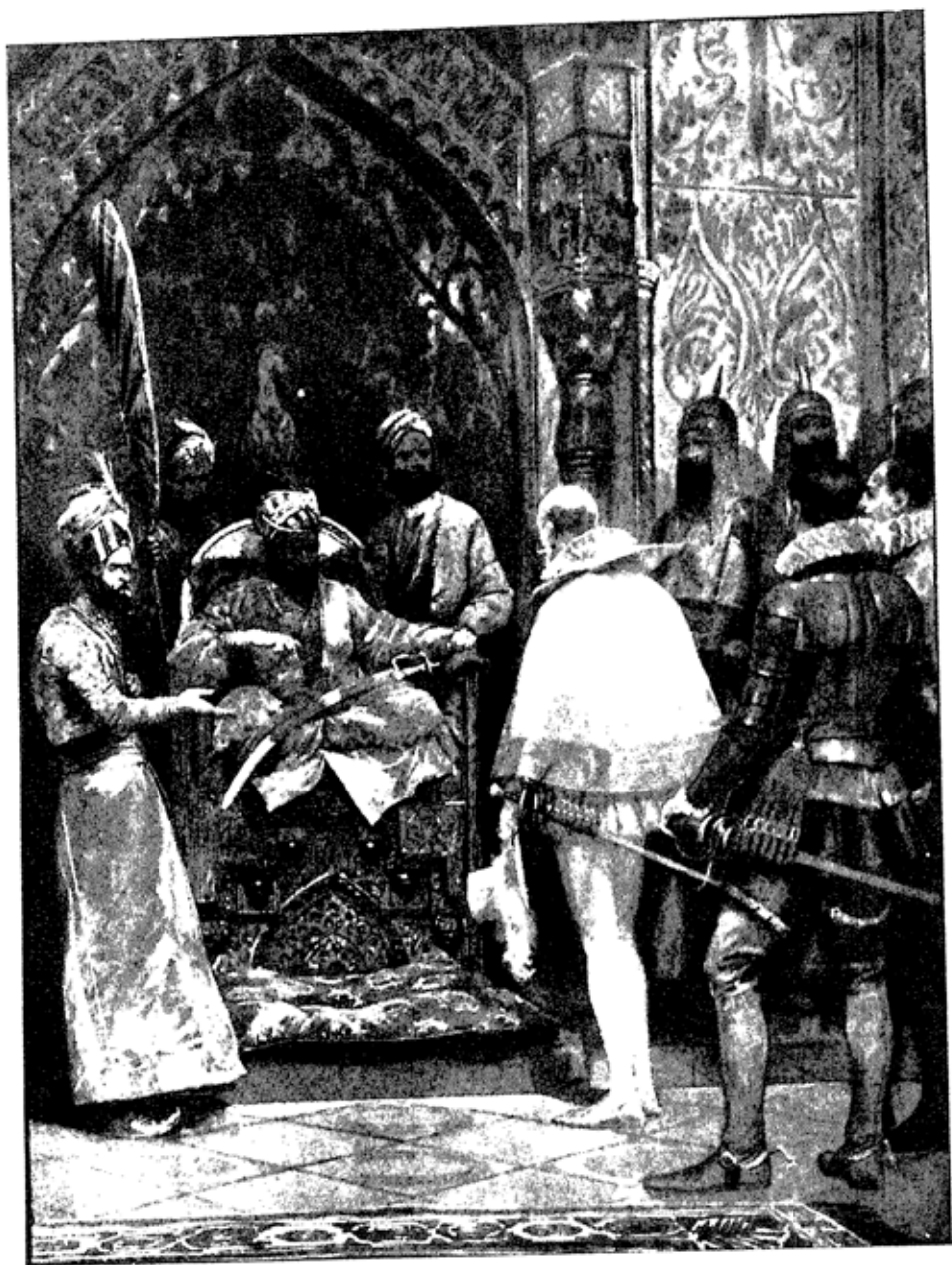
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'The Origin of the East India Company.' The Great Mogul, Akbar, receiving Sir John Mildenhall, the Queen's Ambassador, 1599

R. P. MASANI

Britain in India

AN ACCOUNT OF BRITISH RULE IN
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Calendar of Main Events

1579	Father Thomas Stevens arrives in India
1583	Newbery expedition
1600	The East India Company founded
1612	English factory at Surat
1640	Foundation of Madras
1661	Bombay ceded by Portuguese to Charles II
1690	Foundation of Calcutta
1757	Clive at Plassey
1772-85	Warren Hasting's governorships
1773	The Regulating Act
1784	Pitt's India Act
1786-90	Reforms of Cornwallis
1793	Charter renewal
1798-1805	Lord Wellesley
1807-13	Lord Minto I
1813	Charter renewal
1813-23	Lord Hastings
1819	First British house in Simla
1828-35	Lord Bentinck
1829-37	Abolition of <i>suttee</i> and <i>thuggee</i>
1833	Charter Act. Company's trade abolished
1835	Macaulay's minute on education
1845-9	Sikh wars
1848-56	Lord Dalhousie
1853	Charter renewal. Civil Service opened to competition
1856-62	Lord Canning
1857	The Mutiny. Foundation of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras universities
1858	Transfer of power from the Company to the Crown
1861	Indian Councils Act
1864-9	Sir John Lawrence
1869-72	Lord Mayo's reforms

1885	Indian National Congress founded
1892	Indian Councils Act. Dadabhai Naoroji elected to Parliament
1899-1905	Lord Curzon
1903	Delhi Durbar
1905-10	Lord Minto II
1906	Muslim League founded
1909	Morley-Minto reforms
1911	Delhi Durbar. Capital moved from Calcutta to Delhi
1914	Mahatma Gandhi returns from S. Africa
1916	Lucknow pact
1916-21	Lord Chelmsford
1917	Declaration on self-government
1918	Montagu-Chelmsford Report
1919	Government of India Act. Jallianwallah Bagh
1920-22	Non-co-operation/Khilafat movements
1921-6	Lord Reading
1926-31	Lord Irwin
1928	Simon Commission
1930	Dandi march
1930-32	Round Table Conferences
1931	Gandhi-Irwin pact
1931-6	Lord Willingdon
1932	The Communal Award. The Poona Pact
1935	Government of India Act
1936-43	Lord Linlithgow
1937	Provincial autonomy: Congress ministries
1939	Resignation of Congress ministries
1940	Demand for Pakistan. August Offer
1942	The Cripps Mission. 'Quit India' resolution
1943-7	Lord Wavell
1945	Simla conference. Labour Government in Britain
1945-6	General elections in India
1946	The Cabinet Mission. Interim Government sworn in
1947	Lord Mountbatten. Establishment of Dominions of India and Pakistan. British withdraw

Introduction

THIS book is not offered as a history. An authentic, unbiased story of the rise of British power in India and its abandonment, the declaration of independence simultaneously with the partition of the country and the abrupt withdrawal of the British in August 1947, yet remains to be written. It will need the labour and research of several historians to piece together data collected from the various archives in England and India. The author of this retrospect is not a historian nor an active politician ; but for sixty-five years he has been an eye-witness of many stirring incidents in the country's history, from the day when Dadabhai Naoroji, who had made England his home for forty years and fought for the redress of India's wrongs and her right to self-government, came to India covered with glory as the first Indian member of the House of Commons. As a student of Elphinstone College he witnessed the presentation of an address to the Grand Old Man of India by the students of all colleges in Bombay. During the two decades preceding the declaration of independence and the country's partition he had the privilege of interpreting the best mind in the Indian National Congress to successive representatives of the British Crown and of striving to make rough places smooth. He therefore feels he has something new to say in clearing misconceptions concerning the policies pursued by both the British Government and the Indian National Congress during the later period. Errors were made on both sides that retarded peaceful progress towards the goal of self-government which had been set before the people by sagacious British statesmen in the early years of the nineteenth century. In this retrospect an attempt will accordingly be made to unfold, as faithfully as possible, the story of the British connexion with India since its commencement : its romance, its glory, its tragedy and its pathos.

The tragedy and the agony would have been less prolonged and poignant, had not the British statesmen who enunciated or endorsed the policy of educating and training Indians for self-government, encouraged Indians to believe that the political freedom, the political institutions and the form of autonomous government that would be given to them, as circumstances made it progressively possible, would be of the recognized British type. It was easy for the earlier statesmen to build their hopes on education and look forward to the day when the people of India, educated and trained, would be fully qualified for equality of status with the members of the ruling race and for freedom and responsible government. In practice, however, it was not so simple. Apart from the factor of self-interest that made the bureaucracy reluctant to part with authority, the problem bristled with administrative difficulties. Even champions of liberty and sympathizing friends of India such as the Mills, both father and son, and John Bright, held that the essential prerequisites for parliamentary democracy, viz., the unity of the country and a sufficiently educated and disciplined population, were lacking. In the meanwhile the Indian people were rapidly imbibing ideas of political freedom and democratic principles. Particularly after the birth of the Indian National Congress, a new sense of citizenship, concord and common interest was stirring the people. The rulers of the day could not remain indifferent to its implications, and steps were taken to liberalize the system of administration. The earliest response to the growing national demand was the enlargement of the legislative councils under the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909.

From now on, however, communal rivalries and distrust became the greatest impediment to constitutional progress. The growing importance and strength of the Indian National Congress and its demand for the rapid Indianization of the administrative services and for representative government made the Muslim community as a whole fear that representative government would mean the rule of the majority community or *Hindu raj*. This fear was at the root of the continued opposition of the Muslim League to constitutional reforms which placed increasing power in the hands of the majority party.

Stiffening gradually, the League's antagonism led to the enunciation of the 'two-nation' theory and the demand for a separate home for Muslims, rendering peaceful progress towards the goal of self-government almost impossible. Nevertheless pledges repeatedly given for transfer of power to the people had to be fulfilled. The trusteeship of the British, at first hailed as a blessing, had become positively galling by the turn of the century. A supreme effort was therefore made during the days of the Round Table Conference to bring all the elements of the population into a scheme for an All-India Federation. Although the main features of the scheme had considerable backing in both England and India, the splendid opportunity for the unification of the country was lost, owing mainly to the opposition of the diehards in the Conservative Party, unfortunately for ever.

Transfer of power to the people was overdue in the tumultuous days of World War II. A minority like the Muslim League, however powerful, could not be allowed to hold up reforms indefinitely. Lord Wavell therefore made attempt after attempt during his administration to find an agreed solution to the deadlock. The master-key to the solution of the Indian problem was held by Winston Churchill as Prime Minister of Britain. He stood at the pinnacle of his glory as the saviour from Nazi aggression not only of Britain but also of the whole world. He could have risen still higher in the estimation of the world if he had then arranged, with good grace, for the transfer of power to the people of India, within a specified period, as the crowning achievement of the British raj. There were deterrent factors, no doubt, and a genuine apprehension of the risks involved in the transfer of power while Britain was in the thick of the war. But the difficulties, though great, were such as could have been overcome by a master-mind such as Churchill's. Statesmanship demanded bold action in view of the greater risk involved in further delaying the fulfilment of pledges solemnly given and thus allowing the political situation in India to deteriorate and paralyse the administration. Churchill in fact realized the need for action on the part of the British Government. He had become a realist and was not the diehard

he had been before. His Indian obsessions could no longer keep him insensitive to the political atmosphere in India, nor could he ignore the rapidly changing strategic position and the importance she had acquired during the war. In response to Lord Wavell's personal appeal that his hands as Viceroy should be strengthened in resolving the political deadlock in the country, Churchill was ready and willing to move. Unfortunately, however, even during the disastrous days of military reverses, days which also marked the most critical phase in the history of Indo-British relations, his conviction that caste-ridden India was not fit for parliamentary government did not allow him to offer constitutional reforms acceptable to her. The opposition of the Congress Party to his own proposals stiffened his attitude towards India once more and in an amazingly indiscreet speech he went so far as to boast that he had not become 'the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire'. Within five years the process of liquidation was hastened by his successor in office, even at the risk of chaos.

The aftermath was disastrous. The usual justification for the inordinate delay in resigning power was the anxiety of the rulers not to leave chaos behind them; but the flight of thousands of panic-stricken people that followed the decision to partition the country simultaneously with the declaration of independence, the pillage, the arson, the murders, the rapes and other atrocities, created conditions more chaotic than could ever have been anticipated. It redounds to the credit of those Indian leaders who had taken over the reins of government that order was restored within a short time. But the voluntary abandonment of power by Britain, unprecedented in the annals of subject nations, was shorn of almost all its glory.

The histories of this last phase of the British rule in India which have been published leave several questions unanswered. What efforts were made by Lord Wavell, one of the most conscientious and liberal-minded viceroys of India, to bring together the two warring political parties? What were the circumstances which impelled Attlee as Prime Minister of Britain to change horses midstream and send out Lord

Mountbatten to expedite the withdrawal? What endeavours were made to evolve a neighbourly policy between the Dominions of India and Pakistan? Why did they prove abortive? Why were adequate precautions not taken to avert the holocaust? The reasons remain to be told dispassionately.

In this book an attempt is made to fill some of the lacunae, to recall some little-known facts concerning the early history of the Empire, to relate a few episodes concerning the protracted struggle for freedom which have not found a place in any extant history of the country and to give, in the light of information gathered from various sources, as accurate and as dispassionate an account as possible of what took place during the struggle. As access to official documents, minutes and correspondence between the last two viceroys and Whitehall has not been possible, the author has had to rest content with such first-hand information as he was able to obtain from published material, particularly from Mr V. P. Menon's documented narrative of events preceding the transfer of power, and from the principal actors in the great drama including Earl Attlee and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who have favoured him with frank replies to several inquiries concerning the last phase. He takes this opportunity of expressing his sincere thanks. His gratitude is also due to his esteemed friends Lord Scarbrough, Sir Francis Low and Mr A. D. Gorwala for the interest they have taken in this book. To the first two he is also indebted for the inquiries they kindly made for first-hand information and documentary evidence from certain sources in England. He would also like to acknowledge his debt to his friend, Mr B. K. Karanjia, for assistance in reading the proofs.

For the invitation to write this retrospect, and for the award of a prize, the author is grateful to the Trustees of the Dadabhai Naoroji Memorial Prize Fund.



I

The Lure of India

WHO was the first Englishman to set foot on Indian soil? Historians confer the distinction on Father Thomas Stevens. Son of a prominent London merchant, brought up a Catholic, filled with dreams of the East from reading the works of St. Francis Xavier, he sailed for India from Lisbon on 4 April 1579. The letter he wrote to his father (10 November 1579) aroused England's interest in India. It was passed from hand to hand and it is believed that it marked the beginning of the longing and endeavour of the English people to turn eastward. This is not to say that before that historic visit India had been for England a sealed book. Centuries before it, the English people had come to know 'Hindoostan' as a country rich in romance, a land of enchantment and wonder, a synonym for wealth and splendour, a 'country in which there be divers countries' with a bewildering diversity of creeds, customs and ways of life, a home of 'curious creatures', such as cannibals, elephants, crocodiles and snakes.

The verdict of historians that Stevens was the first visitor from England to India will, perhaps, be challenged some day in the light of further research in the annals of the period preceding the sixteenth century. As a matter of fact, according to an entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the first Englishman to visit India was one Sighelm (also called Sigelinus), who was sent by King Alfred in the year 883 on a pilgrimage to India in fulfilment of a vow. He is reported to have brought for the King 'many strange and precious unions (pearls) and costly spices'. Spices were then in great demand to satisfy the people's desire for pungent flavourings, as their food for six months in each year was salt meat. Gibbon, however, suggests unkindly that Sigelinus went no further than Egypt for his curios.¹

¹ H. G. Rawlinson : *British Beginnings in Western India*, p. 21.

Be that as it may, even if Father Stevens were deprived of the honour of being the earliest English visitor to India, he will long be remembered in English and Indian history and literature as the contemporary of the Marathi poet Eknath and author of a grammar in the Konkani dialect of Marathi, a catechism in Kanarese, the language of the then western Karnatak, and an epic in Konkani, the *Christian Purana*, giving the entire Bible story from the Creation. The following ecstatic description of the Marathi language shows the author's fascination with it :

'Like a jewel among pebbles,' he sings in the *Purana*, 'like a sapphire among jewels, is the excellence of the Marathi tongue. Like the jasmine among blossoms, the musk among perfumes, the peacock among birds, the Zodiac among the stars, is Marathi among languages.'¹

Centuries before the days of King Alfred and the Jesuit Stevens, trade between the East and the West had followed the three great waterways of the Oxus, the Euphrates and the Red Sea. India was the medium of intercourse between China, Japan and Cambodia in the East, and Babylon in the West. When Greece and Rome began to play an important part in the history of the world, they carried on a thriving trade with these countries. Hoards of coins found throughout Malabar contain large quantities of Roman coins of all ages. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks (A.D. 1453) dealt a deadly blow to the flourishing trade carried on by the Venetian and Genoese merchants with Alexandria, Constantinople and the Levant. The trade routes were now in the hands of a hostile power. A free way to the East had to be discovered. Encouraged by the Spanish and the Portuguese kings, adventurous navigators embarked on quests for alternative routes to the East Indies. When, after long and careful preparations and amazing adventures, Vasco da Gama opened up a new route, by rounding the Cape to India and casting anchor off Calicut (20 May 1498), it changed the ancient route for the commerce of East and West. The Portuguese were the first to enter the field ; they were followed by the Dutch. Trade with the spice-

¹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

bearing lands became the monopoly of these two nations. Stories of their rivalry and fierce struggle for supremacy in the eastern trade reached the ears of the English merchants who were still cut off from direct communication with the East Indies and were thirsting for markets to expand their trade. Their interest in India had already been stimulated by the alluring accounts given by travellers. All that was romantic was warmly associated by them with the magic name of India, and now da Gama's epoch-making discovery fortuitously brought their country directly into touch.

'The Indies are discovered,' runs a petition addressed to Henry VIII in 1511, 'and vast treasure brought from thence every day. Let us therefore bend our endeavours thitherwards; and if the Spaniards and Portuguese suffer us not to join with them, there will be yet region enough for all to enjoy.'¹

'The wealth of Ormuz and of Ind' began to stir the imagination of England's bards. Before this era, their touch with India was very vague: Chaucer had only stray references to the great Emetrius, the King of Inde, in *The Knight's Tale*, and to a Buddhist parable in *The Pardoner's Tale*; and Spenser describes thus the hermit in *The Faerie Queene*:

...soild with dust of the long dried way;
His sandales were with toilsome travell torne,
And face all tand with scorching sunny ray,
As he had traveild many a somers day
Through boyling sands of Arabie and Ynde,²

The hearts and minds of people throughout Europe were now stirred and the profound impression made on the English people is reflected in the works of poets and dramatists of the Elizabethan era, particularly Marlowe, Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. New kingdoms were to be had for the taking and new conquests were to be made in the realms of literature, for new vistas were opened for the poet's flights of fancy. Marlowe was the first to turn his torch in these directions. *Tamburlaine the Great*, his first play, was the first literary work in which the dominant idea was the voyage to India round the

¹ Quoted in Macpherson's *Annals of Commerce* and quoted by Rawlinson, *ibid.*, p. 22.

² Book I, canto vi, stanza xxxv.

Cape. Tamburlaine's dominant passion was lust of power and sway over oriental kingdoms, and ambition for empire was a theme congenial to the audience of the day. Cosroe complains that

Men from the farthest equinoctial line
Have swarm'd in troops into the Eastern India,
Lading their ships with gold and precious stones,
And made their spoils from all our provinces.¹

As the discovery of the Cape route to India had dealt a deadly blow to the supremacy of the Venetians' thriving trade in the East, their only hope of averting total ruin lay in piercing the isthmus of Suez, and a plan was laid before them. It met, however, with strong opposition from Egypt. Marlowe refers to the project in the following verses :

Whereas the Terrene and the Red Sea meet,
Being distant less than full a hundred leagues,
I meant to cut a channel to them both
That men might quickly sail to India.²

And one of the first projects of Marlowe's Faustus to accumulate riches is to turn to India :

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicacies;³

In their early attempts to establish commercial relations with the East, English merchants had commenced by trading, in a small way, with the Levant. Having secured the right of trade from Sultan Amurath in 1579, they formed a Turkey Company. To reach India, however, was no easy matter. The Portuguese were absolute masters of the Indian seas; they held not only the new sea route round the Cape but also the Persian Gulf and every gateway for Europeans to India. Nevertheless, against

¹ Part I, act I, sc. i.

² Part II, act v, sc. iii.

³ *Doctor Faustus*, sc. i. 'princely delicacies' refers to pepper and spices, then greatly coveted.

heavy odds English ships at last succeeded in ploughing their way to India.

Within four years of the stir created in England by the memorable letter from Father Stevens a few leading London merchants took a momentous decision. With a view to exploring the possibilities of reviving the old overland trade with the East, by way of Aleppo, they organized early in the year 1583 an expedition to India. Its moving spirit, John Newbery, carried with him a letter of introduction to the Mogul Emperor Akbar from Queen Elizabeth. With three companions, Ralph Fitch, William Leeds and James Story, he set sail for Tripoli on a ship named the *Tyger*. Arriving at Tripoli, they proceeded by caravan to Aleppo and thence to Baghdad and Basra. We need not follow them in their exploits, but it is interesting to record the impression of one of them, Fitch, who alone returned home, about the productiveness of India, which must have whetted the appetite of his countrymen pining for new markets and given the signal for the formation of the commercial companies which led to the rise of British power. 'Here is great traffike,' he says, 'for all sorts of spices and drugges, silke and cloth of silke, sandales, Elephants' teeth and much China worke, and much sugar which is made of the nutte called "Gajara"; the tree is called the palmer : which is the profitabest tree in the worlde.'¹

The exploits of the members of the expedition appear to have created widespread sensation in England, otherwise Shakespeare could not have taken for granted that the following reference, made by him twenty years later in his famous play *Macbeth*, would be understood by his audience :

'Aroint thee, witch !' the rump-fed ronyon cries.

Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger.²

The Newbery expedition to India, the entry of Drake into the Southern Ocean, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, all of which helped open for the English vessels the way to the East, prepared the ground for the memorable meeting held by eighty merchants in London to establish a company

¹ Robert Sencourt : *India in English Literature*, p. 65.

² *Macbeth*, I, iii.

to trade with the East Indies. Notable among the eighty was Ralph Fitch. The scheme had, however, to be abandoned as Queen Elizabeth then feared that it would prejudice her negotiations with King Philip of Spain for peace. The project was renewed, and, on 31 December 1600, she granted a charter to the Company under the historic title, 'The Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies'. According to the nomenclature of those days, the term 'East Indies' comprised not only the countries east of the Bay of Bengal, the straits of Malacca, Java, Siam and all the Spice Islands further eastwards in the Java and Chinese seas, but also India. How the commercial corporation came to be transformed into a political organization, how on the termination of its charter it left the legacy of an oriental empire, is a story frequently related and need not be retold for the purpose of this book. What is pertinent is the question whether the empire was acquired in a fit of absent-mindedness and its growth altogether undesigned, or whether it was dreamt of and planned, as circumstances permitted, almost simultaneously with the start of the East India Company's commercial operations and erection of factories.

Dream of an Empire

IT IS commonly held, because historians have gone out of their way to stress the fallacy, that the rise of the British Empire in India was unpremeditated and unplanned, an accident, a singular stroke of good luck. When originally propounded, there was some evidence in support of this hypothesis, but subsequent evidence has shown that it is not wholly true. It is certainly true, as stated in Keith's *Constitutional History of India, 1600-1935*,¹ that there was little to suggest the acquisition of dominion in India in the début of the Company of Merchants of London to whom Queen Elizabeth, after much hesitation, granted a charter of incorporation. These enterprising men crossed the seas, facing perils and death, merely 'to trade, to turn an honest penny, not to conquer'. But the popular conception of the British dominion in India does not go back to 1600; it is not to that remote date that one looks for an explanation of the motive leading to the gradual establishment of the East India Company's settlements and territories. It is not to the years of infancy of the Company but to the period of its adolescence and maturity that one has to turn for an answer to the question whether the empire was built up deliberately by the agents of the Company in consonance with the wishes of the Directors. The protagonists of the theory of unintentional domination, however, ignore the incidents of that formative period and suggest that the English remained mere traders until the logic of events proved to be too powerful for them and commerce expanded into empire. For instance, even such well-informed historians as Thompson and Garratt claim:

'We went honourably, thinking it no shame to be merchants. But we are attacked as a folk who came as suppliants seeking

¹ Ch. 1, p. 1.

leave to trade, and by devious ways of treachery became rulers of a distracted, peace-loving, helpless land. Yet the miracle is not that commerce ultimately expanded into empire, but that for such a vast of time we were traders and nothing else. Of all the European interloping nations we were the last and most reluctant to draw the sword, even in defence.¹

A later writer, Guy Wint, in his book *The British in Asia*, also states that the British Empire in Asia began 'its mature life' in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century grew to be a system of territories, protectorates and alliances covering the southern part of the Asian continent. He goes on to say: 'The Empire was in fact the result of a more or less private enterprise of a relatively small number of British expatriates. After the British Navy opened the Eastern seas in the eighteenth century (without which no Empire could have been thought of), the British Government gave its more audacious subjects an authority, or licence, or encouragement, to win in the East whatever by intrigue and the most economical use of a small white force they could seize and, by their own devices, hold.'² The fallacy persists. V. P. Menon in his *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States* observes: 'The British Empire in India presents the curious phenomenon of having been built by the agents of the Company in India, at any rate during the initial stages, notwithstanding express directions to the contrary from their principals.'³

These observations reflect a common but a very selective view of history. To the obvious convenience of their theses these writers do not, like Dr Keith, revert to 1600, and ignore the very important events of the seventeenth century. The founding of the East India Company dates from the autumn of 1599 and the first voyage in 1601. This enterprise, launched with the blessings of Queen Elizabeth, contained within itself the seeds of the British Empire in the East, just as twenty-eight years later, with the blessings of Charles I, another enterprise of the Company of Gentlemen and Merchants trading to Massachusetts carried with itself the seeds of another empire

¹ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 5.

² Ch. 1, p. 16.

³ Ch. 1, p. 3.

in the West. With the granting of the first charter to the Company, at the threshold of the seventeenth century, the principle was established (and later disputed with no small degree of acrimony) that nobody in England could trade with the East on his own account since it had been decided that all trading must be on co-operative lines and under the supervision of a governing body. It was private enterprise, as organized in a body of exceptional power and influence, that established the British Empire in India, and it was able to achieve that end through its power to purchase the consent of the Government in England. It is incorrect to suppose that British expatriates alone built the Empire, though some of that band, notably Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, did build on the foundations already and purposefully laid in London.

For a correct understanding of the thesis that the British Empire in India was not unpremeditated, and that from the outset the Company's possessions and prerogatives constituted an empire in miniature and were steadily developed as circumstances required and opportunities permitted, one must study the various charters granted to it in the course of the seventeenth century. The very nature of the Company's enterprise compelled its agents to provide themselves with fortified places and troops. Each renewal of the charter marked the growth of the Company in power and possessions; each furthered its transformation from a purely commercial corporation to a ruling power and strengthened the growing fabric of empire. For instance, it was recognized in 1661, by the charter granted to the Company, that it owned fortresses, not merely factories, and might make peace or war with local powers in case of need. In that year, Bombay went to the British Crown as part of the dowry of the bride of Charles II, and when, in 1668, he leased Bombay to the Company he gave with it full sovereign rights over the territory and its inhabitants. The extent of the islands constituting Bombay was small; the full establishment of political authority over it was a great thing, and that authority was complete with the grant of the right to coin in Bombay money which would be current not only in the East Indies but also in England. The grant of further rights followed. In 1687, the

Company was permitted to establish a municipal constitution for Madras, thereby putting the official seal on the territorial character of its rule in that part of India. It was in Madras, say Thompson and Garratt, that the Company first developed what its critics call imperialism; but signs of imperial development were already apparent before this date. They were in fact visible when Gerald Aungier, the real founder of Bombay, laid down a policy of trade protected by arms against any enemy. Arriving at Bombay, a poor little hamlet at the time, he exclaimed: 'It is a city which, by God's assistance, is intended to be built', and he set in right earnest about building it.¹ It was his aim to make Bombay a safe place for anybody to dwell in, and in explanation of that policy he told the Company: 'The greater force you maintain on the island for its defence, the more encouragements will you give to merchants of all nations and conditions to trust their estates and families and ships there.'

Before that time the Company had gladly followed the advice of Sir Thomas Roe, the famous ambassador to the court of the Great Mogul, that 'without controversy it is an error to affect garrison and land wars in India'. The Company in its first struggles for trade could have had no more congenial advice than that, for it meant safety as well as economy. In practice, however, it was to prove unworkable because it assumed the existence of peaceful conditions which were not to be found in South India outside the area under Mogul control, or in the regions affected by the rise of the Maratha power. So it came about that a fort was built in Madras in 1641; and the need for fortifying Bombay, which was recognized from the day the English landed there, was further impressed on the Company by the outbreak of war with the Dutch in 1665.

Aungier died in 1677, and his policy, which had been accepted with much grumbling by the Company, was checked by Sir Josiah Child, Governor of the East India Company, one of the most remarkable and forceful characters of the seventeenth century. In modern times Child might have been a political dictator or a multi-millionaire, or both, and it was said of him

¹ R. P. Masani: *Evolution of Local Self-Government in Bombay*, p. 37.

that his 'appearance as a city merchant instead of as Emperor of China or the Great Mogul seems an error of Providence'.¹ Thinking of profits rather than of the security of factories, Child insisted on going back to Roe's policy, with results that nearly lost Bombay. A few years later, probably on account of the loss of Bantam in Java, from which the English had been driven in 1682, Child reversed the process and demanded an unprecedented programme of fortification. It was resolved to build a fort at Acheen, to establish a fortified settlement somewhere in the Straits of Sunda, to build a fort on the Hooghly, and to embark 'into a far greater charge not only for the security but for the grandeur of Bombay', putting it 'in a strong posture of defence'.²

There, beyond all dispute, is the affirmation of the policy of establishing a dominion in the East, a policy which was sometimes obscured but which steadily gained support in the first century of the Company's existence. It is very well summed up by Child in the following extracts from two little known letters :

'It is our ambition for the honour of our King and Country and the good of Posterity, as well as of this Company, to make the English Nation as formidable as the Dutch or any other European nation, are or ever were in India ; but that cannot be done only by the form and with the methods of trading merchants, without the political skill of making all fortified places repay their full charge and expense.'³

'That which we promise ourselves in a most especial manner from our new President and Council is that they will establish such a Politie of civil and military power, and create and secure such a large Revenue to maintain both at that place, as may be the foundation of a large, well-grounded, sure *English Dominion in India for all time to come*.'⁴

What sort of dominion was herein contemplated? Having gone to India purely for trade the English adventurers could not at first have thought of territorial aggrandisement or of a

¹ R. and O. Strachey : *Keigwin's Rebellion* (Oxford Historical and Literary Studies), p. 1.

² *ibid.*, p. 111.

³ Letter to Fort St. George, 12 August 1685.

⁴ Letter to Fort St. George, 12 December 1687.

colonial empire of any kind. Their initial requirements were limited to a few bases from which their supremacy at sea could be established and ensured, their trade expanded, and markets exploited for the wares of industrialized England. Military power on a large scale was neither necessary nor conceivable. Even so they must have anticipated the need for expansion and the inevitability of conflict with the Portuguese, who had already carried with them to the East a power at sea which none could resist and had established their dominion over the Indian waters. The English adventurers were prepared to fight and did fight as occasions arose. Such conflict was however incidental to their enterprise: they did not think (it would have been quixotic if they had thought) of uprooting the Portuguese or any other power.

Within the first three generations of its existence the East India Company succeeded in building factories and fortifications first at Masulipatam and Surat (which, after a while, were exchanged respectively for Madras and Bombay), and later at Calcutta. Madras, then a small place, was taken over in 1639 from an independent Hindu chief in return for an annual quit rent. Under English administration it soon grew into a large and prosperous city and carried on an active trade up the Bay of Bengal, across to Burma, Sumatra and Manila, and round Cape Comorin to the Persian Gulf. Bombay, too, attracted a large population and flourished. To these two English settlements was added a third in Bengal. Here also, the administration was in the hands of the English, although not so independently as at Madras and Bombay, the Company being the local representative of the Governor of Bengal and therefore of the Mogul emperor.

This period of comparative quiet was beneficial to all parties concerned. All the three settlements grew rapidly in size and strength. The neighbouring Indian population flocked into the settlements because it found the English both strong and safe to live under and honest and advantageous to trade with. Such was the civil and military power built up by the Company at its settlements in 1687 when the Directors wrote to the factors speaking for the first time of a large well-grounded dominion

for all time to come. This was not merely a dream of the establishment of a new maritime dominion for purposes of trade: it was clearly a prophesy of the expansion of a dominion already in the formative stage. The agents of the Company needed no exhortation to carry out the wishes of their masters. Each charter renewing the Company's lease of life, every twenty years, marked the growth of the East India Company in power and possession and strengthened more and more the fabric of its dominion.

Later it dawned on the Directors that their agents had achieved much beyond their expectations, for the cost of conquest had eaten into the profits of the factories. In the year 1767 the Directors informed the President that in their opinion the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were to be the utmost limits of territorial expansion on that side of India, and on the coast 'the protection of the Carnatic and the possession of the Sircars and on the Bombay side the dependencies thereon with Salsette, Bassein and the Castle of Surat'. 'If we pass these bounds,' they added, 'we shall be led from one acquisition to another until we shall find no security but the subjection of the whole, which by dividing your force would lose us the whole and end in our extirpation from Hindustan.' Accordingly, the Act of 1784, under which the Company's policy in India was subjected to the British Government's control, contained a clause forbidding the Governor-General in Council to make war or to conclude a treaty likely to lead to war for the simple reason that to pursue schemes of conquest and territorial expansion were 'measures repugnant to the wish, the honour and policy of the nation'.

This emphatic declaration of policy came, however, too late for the men on the spot. It was impossible to check the process of empire-building which now held full sway. Wellesley openly repudiated the policy. It was not only for the satisfaction of racial superiority, pride in war, privilege in victory, and the glory and romance of colonial expansion that the officials and armies in India wished to continue the process: they were also impelled by duty, and by a sense of human decency, brotherhood and justice. The anarchy which prevailed in various parts of the

country, the intrigues, nepotism and disorder in the durbars of the Indian princes, their incompetence, depravity and greed contrasted with the poverty of the common people — such were the conditions which provoked the Company's officers to complete the process and put things right by assuming sovereignty over the whole country. That, at any rate, appears to have been the feeling of Wellesley when he affirmed: 'I can declare my conscientious conviction, that no greater blessing can be conferred on the native inhabitants of India than the extension of British authority, influence and power.'¹

It will be seen as we proceed that this sense of mission, though inextricably bound up with self-interest, was wholly in tune with the spirit of humanism and liberalism which had begun to stir the sentiments and dominate the political thought of the British people. If, in spite of the principle of trusteeship adopted in pursuance of this mission, the British administration contained the seeds of exploitation and abuse of justice against which the Indian people were one day to rebel, it was because, swayed though the British statesmen were by benevolent impulses and honest intentions, the process resulted in an unimaginative bureaucracy and a too rigid system of administration.

¹ P. E. Roberts: *India under Wellesley*, p. 136.

The Vision of a Self-Governing India

THE Directors' dream of British dominion for all time to come was followed by the vision of a self-governing India, the prospect of a subject nation trained and equipped for self-government. But there is no evidence until the middle of the nineteenth century of any earnest attempt on the part of the rulers to equip the people to take over the reins of administration.

The narrative of the meteoric growth of the empire does not fall within the scope of our story. The initial difficulties, the rivalries and struggles with the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch and the French, the wars with the Indian principalities and the annexations and adjustments, we must pass over. Nor need we pause to examine how the factories expanded, how the territories conquered or annexed involved responsibility for the protection of the Company and its allies from the influence of neighbouring princes. What is necessary for our purpose is to consider how that responsibility was discharged by the conquerors, their system of government, the evolution of the concept of trusteeship, and the process by which the Indian people were given an increasing share in the task of administration. It is pertinent also to refer to the difficulties involved in introducing a system of parliamentary government proved to work satisfactorily only among a literate, homogeneous and disciplined people.

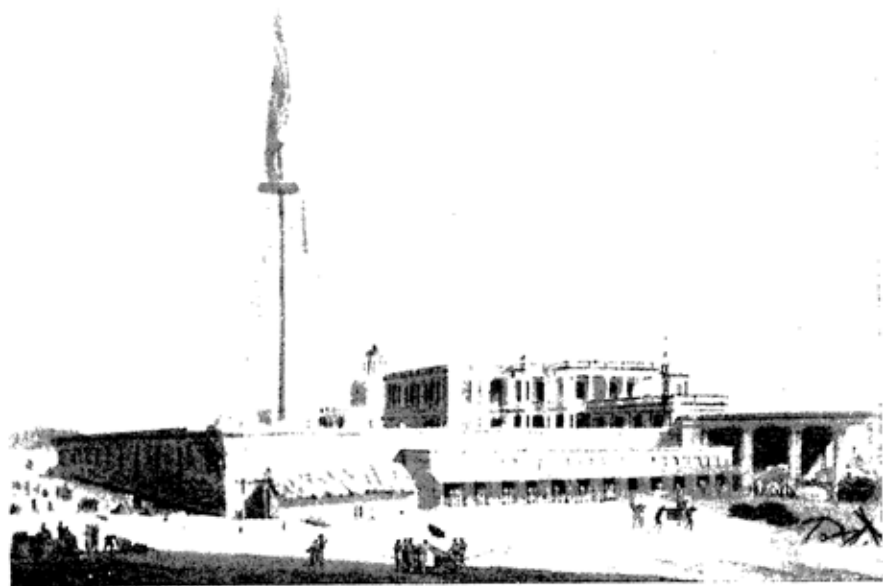
It was not unnatural that, wielding the powers of the great Moguls, the majority of the White Nabobs during the early days slipped into a life of ease, dissipation and corruption, or that their rule over a docile, unarmed populace, unmindful of its rights and wrongs, should have come to be regarded even by their own countrymen as one of rapacity and tyranny. In 1757, when the hero of Plassey, the heaven-sent general and

empire-builder, Robert Clive, entered Murshidabad, the capital of the Nawab of Bengal, he and his officers found the 'treasury heaped with jewels, plate and specie', and helped themselves merrily. Later cross-examined on this incident before a parliamentary committee, Clive indignantly protested: 'Am I not rather deserving of praise for the moderation which marked my proceedings? Consider the situation in which the victory at Plassey had placed me! A great prince was dependent on my pleasure; an opulent city lay at my mercy; its richest bankers bid against each other for my smiles; I walked through vaults which were thrown open to me alone, filled on either hand with gold and jewels. Mr Chairman, at this moment I stand astonished at my own moderation!'¹

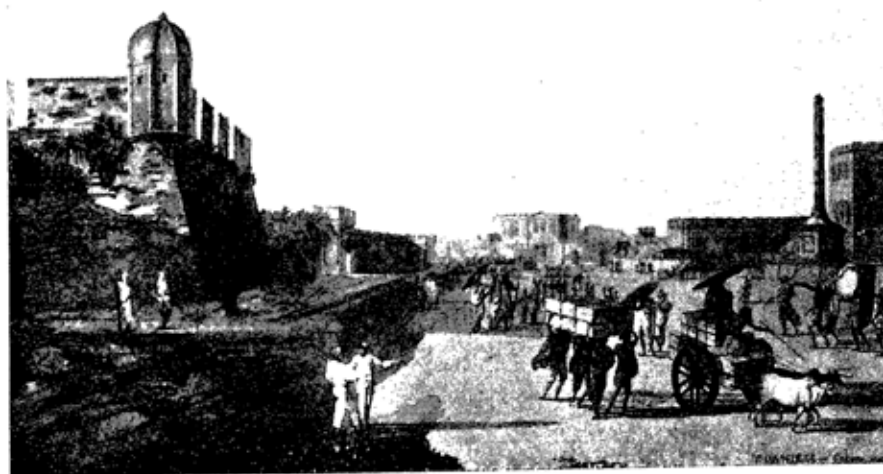
Unlike Clive, Warren Hastings, on becoming Governor of Bengal in 1772, was bent on acts of peace. A scholar, linguist, man of culture and connoisseur of Indian painting, particularly an enthusiastic lover of Sanskrit, he encouraged three eminent scholars, William Jones, Charles Wilkins and Henry Colebrooke to study Sanskrit. It was Jones who founded (in 1784) the Bengal Asiatic Society for promoting oriental research. He translated into English Kalidasa's masterpiece, *Sakuntala*, and some of his lyrics, while Wilkins gave an English version of the Bhagavad Gita. Jones is not to be compared with Henry Colebrooke for erudition in the realm of Sanskrit scholarship, but he and his colleagues, and their successors, accomplished work of inestimable value and significance for both Britain and India. Eager to reduce inequality between Hindus and Muslims, Hastings founded the Muhammedan madressah, or college, at Calcutta with the object of qualifying Muslim youth for 'responsible and lucrative offices of State'.

A man of his outlook would have readily responded to the Directors' instructions, conveyed in a letter to the President in Calcutta, to cry halt to the policy of acquisition, annexation and expansion; but Hastings was not master in his own council. The wars fought during his régime were not of his seeking; they were conflicts in which the Governments of Madras and Bombay had become involved, and over them the Regulating

¹ H. G. Rawlinson: *The British Achievement in India*, pp. 20-21.



Fort St. George, Madras



Clive Street, Calcutta. The Old Fort is on the left, and the 'Black Hole' Monument on the right. Centre, the house Clive occupied after Plassey



Warren Hastings, his wife and her Indian maid. The Governor-General's official residence is in the background.
A painting by Zoffany

Act had given Hastings no control. These provinces had, moreover, reason to fear extermination unless the Marathas in the Deccan, the Nizam in Hyderabad, and Hyder Ali in Mysore, were brought under control. In the circumstances Hastings had to disregard the instructions of the Directors.

The legacy of wars was financial embarrassment. Having failed to secure a loan from the Bank of England, the Company applied to the British Government for accommodation. A committee of investigation was thereupon appointed by Parliament. Its report established the need for parliamentary control to check extravagance and abuses. The Regulating Act of 1773 was thereupon passed, formally committing the British nation to a scheme of empire and subjecting for the first time the Company's dominions in India to parliamentary control. One of its main provisions was the appointment of a governor-general and a council of four members with power to superintend and control the governments of Madras and Bombay. Under another clause a supreme court was to be set up in Calcutta, consisting of a chief justice and three judges appointed to administer British law to all British subjects, English or Indian, who applied to it for redress. Private trade and the acceptance of presents were forbidden. Half-yearly reports and copies of accounts of the revenue of Bengal were to be laid before Parliament by the Directors.

Hastings became Governor-General in Bengal. Of the four councillors, Richard Barwell was already in Calcutta. The other three, General Clavering, Colonel Monson and Philip Francis (believed to be 'Junius') came out to India, prejudiced from the start against Hastings and determined to thwart him. This they were in a position to do, as the Governor-General could be outvoted whenever three members of the Council were opposed to him. No wonder the Council's work was obstructed by constant friction, interference and unabashed vindictiveness! The opponents of Hastings even instigated arch-intriguers to level charges of corruption against him. He, however, maintained his ground and was able to say of the end of this period: 'My adversaries sickened, died and fled.' This had reference to the death of Monson, which was followed by that of

Clavering, and to the departure of Francis on being seriously wounded by Hastings in a duel.

A notable feature of Hastings' administration was the revival and reorganization of ancient Indian institutions, so far as was possible, for the welfare of the peasantry. Having expanded and consolidated the Company's dominion and having laid the foundations of a more peaceful and secure régime than India ever had since the days of Akbar, Hastings retired in 1785, comparatively a poor man considering the fortunes amassed and carried away from India by Clive and others. Little could he have dreamt of the storm that was to burst over his head in his retirement. As the result of intrigues by his enemies, he was impeached at the bar of the House of Commons by Burke, Sheridan and Fox. The prosecution was precipitated, it is believed, by the meddling of his friends and the folly of his agent, Major Scott (Waring), who according to General Grant who wrote to Cornwallis in India (6 April 1788), 'bullied Burke into the persecution', taunting him in the House of Commons and inquiring when he intended to fulfil vague threats thrown out by him of instituting a searching inquiry into Indian incidents.¹

The list of accusations against Hastings comprised violation of treaties with the Nawab of Oudh, oppressive treatment of the Begums of Oudh and the Raja of Benares, fraudulent dealings and acceptance of presents. The case dragged on from 1788 to 1795, when he was acquitted of all charges. It was in consonance with the sense of justice of the British people that the grave allegations levelled against him should be sifted by a court of justice; but Burke and Sheridan were virulent in their attack and invectives, whereas, in marked contrast, Hastings' defence was dignified and straightforward. 'I gave you all,' he said in anguish at the conclusion of the defence, 'and you have rewarded me with confiscation, disgrace and a life of impeachment.' It was not long before his due reward came in the shape of a pension sufficient to maintain himself as a country gentleman, happy and contented in intellectual pursuits. Another more precious reward came in 1813 when, in

¹ Thompson and Garratt, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

extreme old age, he was called to the House of Lords to give evidence. Moved by an impulse of reverence, the whole house rose spontaneously to its feet, an exceptional tribute which touched him deeply.

The impeachment of Hastings serves to demonstrate that even during those days of anarchy and misrule British statesmen held that the exercise of supreme power, even in so remote a country as India, could be held justifiable only in so far as it rested on justice and aimed at good government. It also shows that the system of administration laid down in the Regulating Act had not given the State complete control over the Company, the Directors control over their servants, or the Governor-General over the governors of Madras and Bombay. A Bill to remove these defects, known as Fox's India Bill, was therefore introduced in the House of Commons; but it was thrown out by the Lords from fear that the Whigs would use the patronage of India for corrupt ends. In the following year Pitt introduced another enactment, leaving political as well as commercial power in the hands of the Company but setting up a Board of Control consisting of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Secretary of State and four Privy Councillors appointed by the King to exercise strict supervision over the Directors. The number of the Governor-General's council was reduced to three, and by a supplementary Act of 1793 the Governor-General was empowered to overrule the majority on his own responsibility. Waging aggressive wars was prohibited. The Company still remained the executive authority in India, but its governing powers were circumscribed. Though amended in 1813, the Regulating Act remained the framework for the governance of the country until 1858.

There was a consensus of opinion that the Governor-General under the new Act should be one who had never been in the service of the Company, who was essentially unconnected with its members, who was of a rank superior to those of his associates in the government, who had parliamentary experience, and who could command the support of the Ministry at home. The man accordingly selected was the Earl of Cornwallis, a distinguished soldier, renowned as much for sturdy courage as for simple

habits, transparent sincerity and integrity. Notable as were his achievements in cleaning not a few Augean stables and in carrying out administrative reforms and setting a high standard of official propriety and incorruptibility, it was most unfortunate that he should have enunciated, though through honest conviction based on experience of scheming potentates and venal officials of the day, a policy of Europeanization of all high offices in the administration. He felt that 'without a large and well regulated body of Europeans' the Company's hold on its valuable dominions must be insecure. Such a policy might have been expedient at the time, but to it can be traced the beginning of the discontent and unrest leading to the demand for Indianization of offices even in pre-university days. With the spread of English education among the people it became the war-cry of Indian politicians and culminated in the struggles to throw off the British yoke. It did not occur to Cornwallis, as it did two decades later to Lord Francis Hastings and other enlightened representatives of the Company, that instead of depriving Indians of their legitimate share in the administration of their country it would have been sounder policy to train them for offices of higher responsibility.

Lord Wellesley was appointed Governor-General in 1798, and soon after his arrival the map of India was considerably changed. In 1798 the British had three settlements, Bengal, Bombay and Madras, separated by many hundreds of miles of hostile country and threatened by the Marathas, Hyder Ali and the French. By the end of 1803, the Company's sway extended over the whole of India. The Indian princes were reduced to the status of vassals and the threat of French domination in the East had receded, Nelson having destroyed their fleet in Aboukir Bay. To administer the vast territories which had come under the control of the British an organized service was essential. Wellesley, therefore, founded a cadet college at Fort William, Calcutta, where cadets could be given a thorough training in oriental languages, history and law. Some of the first cadets to be admitted to his college, notably Mountstuart Elphinstone, distinguished themselves as scholars and as administrators. The Directors, however, were not enamoured of the

project. Many of the functions of the college were later transferred to a new one at Haileybury in England, conducted under their control.

Wellesley was recalled in 1805. His ambitious schemes and conquests, brilliant though they were, had involved the Directors in financial liabilities and political responsibilities which they could not face with equanimity. His haughty and defiant bearing might have been another reason for his recall. 'If I were in his place,' observed the aged Warren Hastings, 'I would tell him that civility costs little.' But the relations between the Directors and the Governor-General had been far too strained to permit of mutual understanding and co-operation. Wellesley's ambition was to make the English supreme throughout the peninsula, but the underlying motive of his policy was not lust for power nor ambition for victory or glory but anxiety to prevent the French obtaining a footing at any of the courts of the Indian chiefs. Subsequent events justified his fears. Soon after Lord Minto assumed the governor-generalship, he found that there were strong grounds for apprehending danger not only from within but also from beyond the Indian frontier.

In 1808 Napoleon stood forth as the undisputed master of Europe. Spain, Italy and Holland had long been vassal states; Austria and Prussia had both been crushed. The peace of Tilsit between France and Russia boded ill for England. All circumstances pointed to the possibility of Napoleon turning to the East to seek a new world to conquer. The Sultan of Turkey was a subservient ally. At the court of the Shah of Persia, too, French influence was supreme, General Gardane having been sent to Teheran to prepare the way for a joint invasion of India by Persian and French armies. The danger would yet be averted if friendly relations could be established with the several powers that held the keys to the north-western frontier. Aided by British arms, these powers could act as buffers and check the advance of the enemy. Lord Minto, therefore, sent embassies to the states lying on and beyond the Indus with a view to making defensive alliances with their rulers.

The time for renewal of the Company's charter was drawing near, and a Bill for renewing it for another term of twenty

years, but extinguishing its monopoly to trade in India, was on the anvil. The logic of events had demonstrated the need to retain sovereignty over the territories acquired or controlled by the Company, and self-interest happily coincided with the exigencies of the hour. A new era of enlightenment was however dawning. The British statesmen of the day were swayed as much by their sense of obligation to the people of India as by consideration of the interests of the shareholders of the Company and the British people generally. A close connexion between India and England, signifying interdependent interests, was the keynote of the Bill. The speech delivered by Lord Grenville in presenting the Bill, the Grenville of the famous Ministry of All Talents that had come to grief in 1804, may be read in *Hansard*¹ with interest even today. The policy envisaged in the Bill had three purposes: 'The first,' he said, 'was to declare British sovereignty, the sovereignty of the Crown being the only foundation on which we either discharge our duties or maintain our rights. . . . The British Crown is *de facto* sovereign in India. How it became so it is needless to inquire. This sovereignty cannot now be renounced without still greater evils, both to that country and to this, than even the acquisition of power has ever yet produced. It must be maintained. . . . That sovereignty, which we hesitate to assert, necessity compels us to exercise.' The second purpose was the welfare of the people of India, and the third, the interests of Great Britain. 'Pursued with sincerity,' said Grenville, 'and on the principles of a just and liberal policy, there exists between them a close connexion, a necessary and mutual dependence.'

It is interesting to note that the Act of 1813 dealt with the dominion of the Company as though it were a full-fledged British empire in India. It threw open the general Indian trade to all British merchants, subject to various restrictions. It also empowered the Directors and, on their refusal, the Board of Control to grant licences to persons wishing to proceed to India 'for the purpose of enlightening or reforming Indians', or for other lawful purposes. Maintenance of forces was to be the first charge on the revenue, payment of interest the second, and

¹ Vol. xxv (11 March to 10 May 1813), pp. 709-54.

maintenance of civil and commercial establishments the third. Provision was made for the first time for setting apart a sum of £10,000 and applying it 'to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India'. Thus commenced the policy and the process of liberalization. That it would lead to a demand and struggle for liberation was then beyond imagining. There was certainly no illusion that India would always remain a subject nation: it was anticipated that British control would sooner or later be withdrawn; but it was also taken for granted that it could not voluntarily be withdrawn until the Indian people had acquired the capacity for self-government, until there were prospects of unity and stability within the country and of security from external attack. These assumptions implied a long process of training for self-rule.

The prevailing note was one of caution and was to remain so for more than a hundred and thirty years. Even the advanced liberal James Mill changed his tone when turning, during the discussion of the Reform Bill of 1832, from the British to the Indian problem: 'We have to engraft on despotism the natural fruits of liberty. . . . it behoves us to be cautious even to the verge of timidity.' Thereafter, whenever the Company's charter came up for renewal, whenever reforms in the administrative system of government were foreshadowed, the prevailing note was circumspection. It was heard at the time of the renewal of the Company's charter in 1833 and again on the occasion of the famous declaration of 20 August 1917, announcing the gradual development of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. It was heard even in 1946 when the British Government sent to India a special Cabinet Mission to seek agreement with leaders of Indian opinion on the question of setting up a machinery of government under which India could realize her full and independent status.

Grenville's statesmanlike speech opened a new chapter in the history of India. Indeed, the first three decades of the nineteenth century constitute an era of sublimating liberalism.

For England too, it was the golden age of the Reform Bill, of Catholic emancipation, of the abolition of slavery; it was the age of enlightened statesmen such as Burke, Pitt and Wilberforce in England, and Wellesley, Lord Hastings, Munro, Malcolm, Elphinstone, Metcalfe and Bentinck in India, all filled with a deep sense of mission. To them goes the credit of raising the administration of the East India Company from the counter to the pedestal of trusteeship. Even while they were engaged in building, they were contemplating its end. The instability of empires, even the mightiest, was ever before their eyes, and their ideas about government and its obligations towards the governed were cast in the loftiest mould. None of them appears ever to have entertained the idea that India would for ever remain subject to British domination, and not a few of them urged that British domination should end in the resignation of power into the hands of the people.

The foremost among them was Wellesley. 'Duty, honour, and policy,' he wrote, 'require that India should not be administered as a temporary and precarious acquisition, as an empire conquered by prosperous adventure and extended by fortunate accident. It must be considered as a sacred trust.'¹ Munro, whose services to the Company for 47 years, from 1780 to 1827, constitute a brilliant record of civil as well as military achievement, went a step further. He continuously stressed the need to train Indians for high offices of trust, and looked forward to a time when the condition of the people would have so far advanced as to enable them to govern and protect themselves. 'What is to be the final result of all our arrangements,' he asked, 'on the character of the people? Is it to be raised or is it to be lowered? Are we to be satisfied with merely securing power and protecting the inhabitants, leaving them to sink gradually in character lower than at present; or are we to endeavour to raise their character, and to render them worthy of filling higher situations in the management of their country, and of devising plans for its improvement?' The answer was: 'It ought undoubtedly to be our aim to raise the minds of the Indian people, and to take care that, whenever our connexion

¹ H. G. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

with India might cease, it did not appear that the only fruit of our dominion there had been to leave the people more abject and less able to govern themselves than when we found them.¹ Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay and biographer of Clive, spoke and wrote in the same vein: 'We must, or we cannot last, contrive to associate the natives with us in the task of rule, and in the benefits and gratifications which accrue from it.'²

To the Earl of Moira, better known as the Marquis of Hastings, who arrived as Governor-General in the year 1813, goes the credit of suggesting, for the first time, voluntary withdrawal of power. Of him it was said by Canning that Europe never produced a more accomplished statesman nor India, fertile as it was in heroes, a more skilful soldier. Much of his time and attention was devoted to wars he could not avoid. But he was interested more in the duties of a statesman than in deeds of prowess. He was foremost amongst the servants of the Company for honest intentions and his earnest desire to remove the disabilities and promote the welfare of the people. About the time he assumed the governor-generalship, there was a spurt in the activities of the missionaries in India. The Directors of the Company frowned on the proselytizing and the educating programmes of these saintly souls who had been for some time preaching the word of God in the land of Buddha and Sankaracharya. They had grave misgivings that education on Western lines would make the people less tractable and submissive and ultimately aspire to throw off the foreign yoke. Hastings, however, manfully replied that it was erroneous to think that the spread of knowledge would undermine authority. 'It would be treason to British sentiment to imagine,' he added, 'that it could ever be the principle of this Government to perpetuate ignorance in order to secure paltry and dishonest advantages over the blindness of the multitude.'³ In a prophetic mood, he wrote in his private journal (17 May 1818):

'A time not very remote will arrive when England will, on

¹ Minute of 31 December 1824.

² H. G. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

³ See Joseph Chailley: *Administrative Problems of British India*, p. 482.

sound principles of policy, wish to relinquish the domination which she has gradually and unintentionally assumed over this country, and from which she cannot at present recede. In that hour it would be the proudest boast and most delightful reflection that she had used her sovereignty towards enlightening her temporary subjects, so as to enable the native communities to walk alone in the paths of justice, and to maintain with probity towards their benefactress that commercial intercourse in which she should then find solid interest.'

These were noble sentiments, expressed at a time when the Company was at the zenith of its power, but there was nothing in them to encourage the authorities in England to enlighten the people and equip them for responsible government. For that we have to turn to the minutes written by Mountstuart Elphinstone in his capacity as Administrator in Poona and subsequently as Governor of Bombay. In minute after minute, report after report, private conversation and correspondence, unseen by historians for decades and as yet little known, he gave emphatic expression to England's duty towards the people.

The acid test of a government's recognition of its duty towards its subjects is its educational policy. To the lasting glory of Elphinstone's name, an army officer, Lieutenant-General Briggs, has left behind this anecdote which reveals his enthusiasm for educational activity :

On my observing in the corner of his tent one day a pile of printed Mahratti books, I asked him what they were meant for.

'To educate the natives,' said he, 'but it is our high road back to Europe.'

'Then,' I replied, 'I wonder you, as Governor of Bombay, have set it on foot.'

'We are bound,' he answered, 'under all circumstances, to do our duty to them.'

As early as 1819 Elphinstone had speculated on the fate of the empire, the day of separation that must come and the best policy the rulers could pursue. 'Divide and rule' was the maxim left by the Romans for those who wished to embark on colonialism. But ethics apart, was it politic on utilitarian grounds to adopt the maxim? In a letter written in June 1819 to Sir James Mackintosh, renowned jurist and scholar, Elphinstone spoke out freely : 'I am afraid the belief that our Indian Empire

will not be long-lived is reason, and not prejudice. It is difficult to guess the death it may die; but if it escapes the Russians and other foreign attacks, I think the seeds of its ruin will be found in the native army—a delicate and dangerous machine, which a little mismanagement may easily turn against us.' If the end must come, he held, it should be as a result of the improvement of the Indian people reaching such a pitch as would render it impossible for a foreign nation to retain the government. 'It is for our interest to have an early separation from a civilized people, rather than a violent rupture with a barbarous nation, in which it is probable that all our settlers and even our commerce would perish, along with all the institutions we had introduced into the country.'¹ For a lucid exposition of his thesis one can turn to his minute of 1824. It might be urged, he observed, that there was much ground for the apprehension that if the subject people were raised to equality with the rulers by education, and at the same time admitted to a share in their government, they would be unlikely to be content with the position assigned to them and would never rest until they had made good their title to the whole. 'But I do not see,' he added, 'that we are at all more secure on any other plan. If we endeavour to depress the natives, our government may be overthrown by their resistance; and such a catastrophe would be more disastrous and more disgraceful than that just supposed. Even if we succeeded in the attempt, our empire, being unconnected with the people, would be liable to be subverted either by foreign conquest or by the revolt of our descendants; and it is better for our honour and interest, as well as for the welfare of mankind, that we should resign our power into the hands of the people for whose benefit it is entrusted, than that it should be wrested from us by a rival nation, or claimed as a birthright by a handful of creoles.'²

Thirty years later, in reference to a book about China, the same views were reiterated in a letter to Sir T. B. Colebrooke:

'The moral is that we must not dream of perpetual possession, but must apply ourselves to bring the natives into a state that

¹ J. S. Cotton: *Mountstuart Elphinstone*, pp. 185-6.

² *ibid.*, p. 189.

will admit of their governing themselves in a manner that may be beneficial to our interest as well as their own and that of the rest of the world ; and to take the glory of the achievement and the sense of having done our duty for the chief reward of our exertions.¹

In his anticipations of the end of the empire and of a self-governing India, Elphinstone stands unequalled amongst his contemporaries and predecessors. The greater is his glory when one considers that behind his speculations there was a profound conviction of the duty of a ruler towards the people in his care, and moreover that, having laid down the aim of the British connexion to be to educate and equip the people to govern themselves, he should have cherished the ideal and pursued it in actual administration. The spirit of commerce still dominated the minds of his compatriots, and the extension of colonial sway was the British public's natural ambition : thus, to have taken his stand on the highest principles of public policy ; never to have swerved from it despite the opposition of the Directors of the Company and of the members of his own Council ; and to have advocated withdrawal of colonial sway, revealed indeed superb courage and integrity of purpose.

¹ *ibid.*, p. 190.

The Empire at its Zenith

THE first official recognition of the administration's responsibility for the education of the people opened a new chapter in the country's history. Belated though the acceptance of this elementary duty was, and paltry the amount set aside for the encouragement of learning, it marked the dawn of an era, for from it emerged an empire resting on foundations strengthened and broad-based on educational, social and political reforms.

Why did it take so long for the new era to open? What was the reason for the rulers' neglect of their bounden duty? Was it that they were solely engrossed in the task of consolidating conquered territories and increasing profits, or was it because they had forgotten the simple lesson of history that the perils of an ignorant multitude are greater than those of external aggression? An answer is found in the educational history of England herself.

It is amazing how backward the educational policy of England was during the times of which we are speaking. Although universal education had made rapid strides in Switzerland, Prussia and the United States of America, its advantages were not brought home to the English people until the year 1870. No grant from public funds was made for education in England until the year 1834; no grant-in-aid towards the maintenance of voluntary schools until 1846; no parliamentary enactment of any importance for the diffusion of knowledge until 1870. The country might not have been stirred to action even then, had not the Prussian victories in the Franco-German War demonstrated to the world the immense advantage to a nation of an educated rank and file and the disastrous consequences of leading an illiterate people to war. When these facts are taken into consideration and when it is remembered that one after another the British rulers of India were urging the education

of the Indian people even before the first grant from public funds had been sanctioned for the education of the English people themselves, it is unfair to suggest that the Indian masses were deliberately kept ignorant for political reasons. This is not to say that the voices of self-interest were altogether silent. Human nature being what it is, there is invariably a conflict between self-interest and duty in the treatment of the peoples of backward countries in which advanced nations establish themselves. There is also the misgiving that kindling the torch of knowledge in those dark regions may ignite aspirations fatal to the maintenance of alien domination. Such considerations were not altogether absent from the minds of the Directors of the East India Company.

A knowledge of English was considered essential to advancement by a small but growing section of the people. As, however, the funds provided for education were reserved for the upkeep of a Sanskrit college and the Muhammadan madressa, and for promoting scholarly works in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, there grew a parallel demand for funds for the propagation of English language and literature. The missionaries were the earliest in the field of English teaching. They were followed by a sprinkling of advanced Indians in the principal cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, who opened schools and collegiate institutions in which English was taught.

Lord Bentinck came to India in 1828 with a mandate from the British Government to abolish the ancient custom of suttee (widow-burning). He was not a stranger to India. He had been Governor of Madras and was known for his liberal outlook. 'Britain's greatness must be founded on Indian happiness' was his concept of his country's mission in India. The mandate to uproot an inhuman practice which dishonoured the names of India and Britain alike had a sacred significance for him. He was warned by all around him that the custom of immolating widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands was rooted in religion and that any attempt towards its abolition by legislation would be disastrous. But in discharging the task entrusted to him, Bentinck showed himself willing to risk infuriating the populace and immolating himself on the altar

of duty. 'I should be guilty,' he said, 'of little short of the crime of multiple murder if I should hesitate in the performance of this solemn obligation.' Thus in 1829 the famous Regulation No. XVII was passed, proclaiming the practice of suttee illegal and punishable as culpable homicide in Bengal, Bombay and Madras. Loud protests and bitter strife ensued, and a number of Brahmins appealed against the Regulation. The Privy Council, however, upheld it. Ancient customs die hard : for more than a hundred years after the prohibition there were frequent occurrences of Hindu widows voluntarily springing into the flames and of some dragged to the pyre against their wishes.

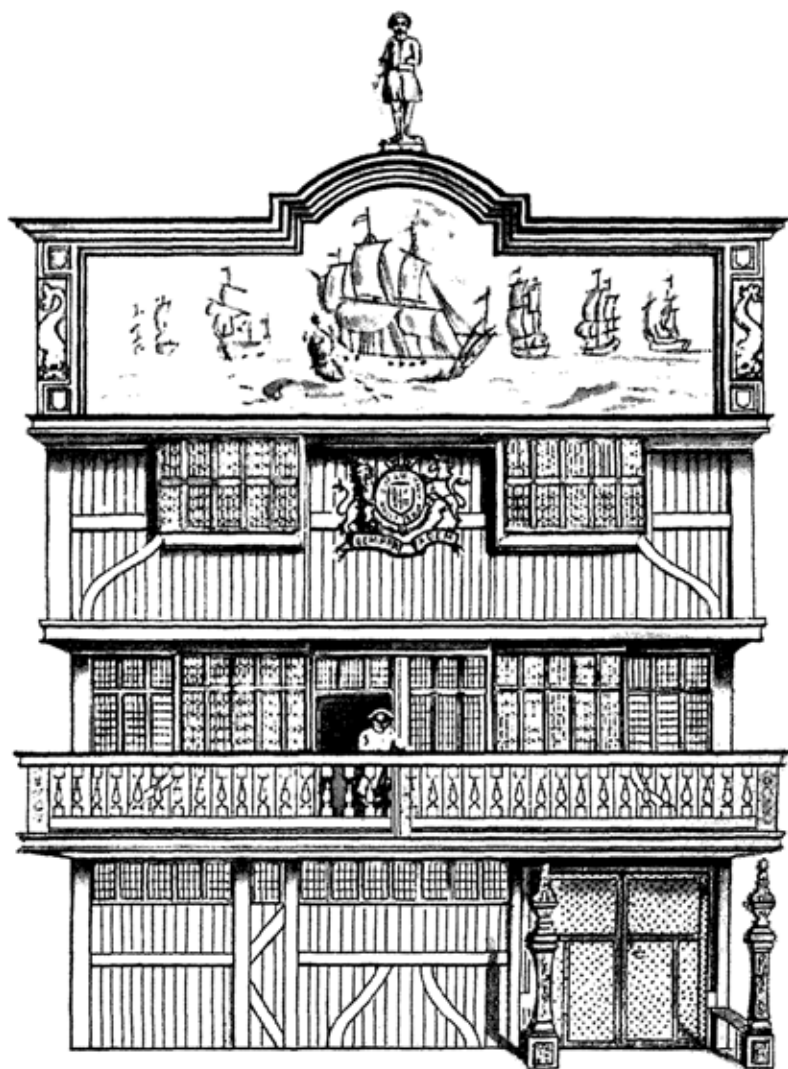
Another of Bentinck's achievements was the suppression of thuggee, the ritual of strangling of innocents, in the name of religion, by highwaymen who called themselves devotees of the blood-stained goddess Kali. Every year, on the occasion of the autumn festival Dassera, human sacrifices were made to the goddess. In the name of religious sacrifice, gangs of bandits would assemble and carry out operations of murder and plunder. Since the beginning of the fourteenth century Muslim rulers had attempted to put a stop to their terrorism by deporting and executing numerous thugs ; but the secret societies with their elaborate ramifications survived until Bentinck created a special agency for the suppression of thuggee and dealt it a deadly blow.

Although a staunch adherent of the policy of non-intervention in the disputes of Indian chiefs, and a confirmed pacifist, Bentinck could not help intervening in the case of a rebellion in the State of Mysore against the misgovernment of the ruler. He deposed the Raja, but unlike his predecessors he did not annex the State. Its administration was taken over by the paramount power and restored after fifty years. The experiment was eminently successful : Mysore became one of the best governed and flourishing states in India.

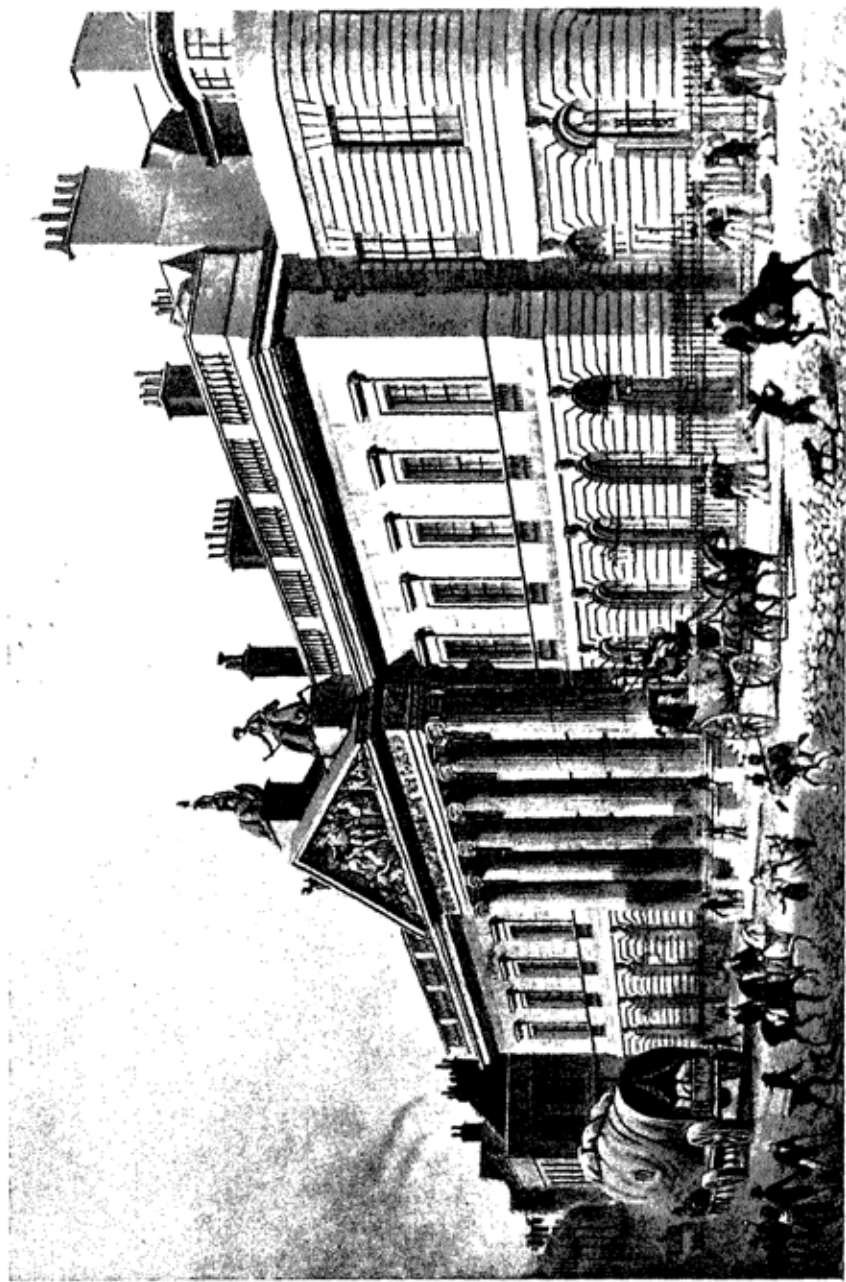
The Charter Act of 1833 was the most important event of Bentinck's governor-generalship. It finally put an end to the commercial operations of the East India Company and renewed for another twenty years only its political and administrative

powers 'in trust for His Majesty, his heirs and successors'. The Governor-General in Council was empowered, with certain reservations, to make laws and regulations, and all executive legislative powers were vested in him. To codify the existing rules and regulations in the provinces a fourth member of the Council was introduced. Thomas Babington Macaulay, who came to India as the new Law Member, had already made his mark as a statesman with a historic speech in the House of Commons in support of the principles of the Charter Bill of 1833. He now took the opportunity to assist in the implementation of what he called 'that wise, that benevolent, that noble clause' which laid down that 'no native of the said territories, nor any natural-born subject of His Majesty resident therein shall, by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them be disabled from holding any place, office or employment under the Company'. A rider to this was added by the Directors to the effect that the meaning of the enactment was that 'there shall be no governing caste in India'. Bentinck was resolved to reverse the policy of Cornwallis which banned Indians from employment in responsible judicial and executive positions, and it is believed that this Charter Act was introduced at his instance.

The indianization of offices in the administration could only proceed with the progress of Western education among the people. The educated classes were eager to acquire proficiency in English as it was the language in which the administration was carried on. As President of the Board of Education, Macaulay fervently advocated the use of funds set apart for education in teaching what was most worth knowing, and he had no doubt whatever that English was more worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic. Unjustified though he was in ridiculing, owing to his ignorance of Sanskrit and Arabic literature, 'the scholasticism, the pedantry and the uselessness for all practical purposes of oriental studies', in training Indian youth for administrative offices and self-government he gave the best service of which he was capable to the people of India. The Resolution issued in 1835, just before Bentinck's retirement, stated that 'the great object of the British Government ought



The Old East India House, London, 1648-1726. Adapted from a drawing by a Dutch artist



The East India House, London, 1833

to be the promotion of European literature and science among the people of India and that the funds appropriated to education would be best employed in English education'. Thus between 1833, when the East India Company's charter was renewed for a further period of twenty years, and 1853 a class of politically conscious Indians, brought up on Milton and Byron, Mill and Adam Smith, learnt, even before the inauguration of universities, to apply the lessons of English literature and history to their own country. The Company's application for extension of its charter afforded them an opportunity to ventilate the grievances of their people: the administrative machinery was cumbrous; the education of the mass of the people was neglected and internal development ignored. The rising generation of educated Indians felt that they had the right to demand that the spirit of commerce should no longer dominate the government of the country. And their greatest grievance was the exclusion of Indians from the service of the state. In 1852 it looked as if the leaders of the different parties in England, the Ministers, the President of the Board of Control and the Company's Directors had agreed among themselves that the Company's charter should be renewed for a further term of twenty years. The British public, even the House of Commons, took little interest in the matter. The people of India, however, who dreaded the continuance of the antiquated regime, could not afford to look on.

The Bengalis took the lead and formed an Association to send representatives to the British Government. Ram Mohan Roy, the foremost among the politically conscious Indians of the first half of the nineteenth century, a pioneer in all movements for reform and a staunch upholder of the political rights of his countrymen, went to England, defying the ban on orthodox Hindus from crossing the seas, to represent India's case before a Select Committee of the House of Commons. Bombay was not slow to follow suit. On 26 August 1852 a meeting was held in the rooms of the Elphinstone Institution and on the same day was inaugurated the Bombay Association, the first political association in the Bombay Presidency. In a petition to the British Parliament it asked for an enlightened system of

government for India. A few British friends sympathized with the movement. The cynical Cobden was one of the few who could not see any advantage, either to the people of India or to their foreign masters, in this vast possession. 'Hindoostan,' he wrote, 'must be ruled by those who live on that side of the globe. Its people will prefer to be ruled, badly according to our notions, by its own kith and kin than to submit to the humiliation of being better governed by a succession of transient intruders from the antipodes.' On 13 March 1853, a meeting of 'The Friends of India' was held in Charles Street, St. James's Square, London, and constituted itself into an India Reform Society. Its activities, however, could not materially influence the decision of the House of Commons, which in passing the Charter Act of 1853 acquiesced in the retention of the double system of government with all its cumbrous machinery.

The Bombay Association's unexpected indictment of the Company's administration caused a rift in the lute. Soon after the text of the petition was published, the English journals which had at first blessed the movement began to find fault with it. Several Indians seceded from it. The most indignant of the Anglo-Indian newspapers was *The Telegraph and Courier*. That English institutions could be established in India by the people and for the people, was a notion to which, in the opinion of that oracle, no honest politician could ever lend the slightest countenance. 'Might we not as well attempt,' asked the writer, 'to assimilate the natural productions of the two hemispheres as strive to naturalize in the East the growth of Anglo-Saxon civilization? Even were the soil fitted for its reception, would the tree of Liberty flourish after its transplanting? Should it not be raised from the seed and not the graft?' There was, however, at least one British journalist able to look beyond his nose: 'It would be a lamentable mistake,' he observed in the *Spectator*, 'to suppose that a movement like this could be disposed of by being put down or put off, nor would it be a less mistake to suppose that to grant the claims of this petition in substance would be a concession to the Natives at the expense of the British. On the contrary, it would com-

mence, in a more thorough style than we have yet attempted, the work of identifying the Natives, their affections and progress with English institutions, thus recruiting the alien civil force, by which we hold the country, with a far more numerous militia of attached volunteers.' How the need for enlisting a militia of attached volunteers was brought tragically home to the British public four years later by the Sepoys' Revolt, will be seen in the following chapter.

Before we come to this most catastrophic incident in the history of British rule in India we must pause to notice some of the nation-building activities and reforms, social, economic and educational, undertaken during the decade preceding the storm that burst over the country and sent a thrill of horror through both India and Britain. Noted though the administration of Lord Hardinge was for a series of campaigns on the battlefield in which the Sikhs were decisively beaten, it will be remembered more for the war he waged against the barbarous customs then prevalent. The most revolting of these was infanticide. Wellesley had prohibited the offering of children to Ganga Mata—the river Ganges—but the custom of making away with baby girls was still common, particularly among the Rajputs. Hindu religion enjoined marriage in the same caste, and it was often difficult for parents to find suitable boys within their own caste for their girls. For marriage outside the caste they had to pay prohibitive sums of money as dowry. Faced with two evils, the disgrace of having unmarried daughters and the payment of a ruinous dowry, they preferred what appeared to be an easier way out, infanticide! Many a governor-general and officer of the Company endeavoured to discourage the atrocious custom, and assistance was offered to raise funds for payment of dowries. Lord Hardinge received, before retirement, assurances from the rulers of twenty-four states that they would take effective measures to abolish the custom, together with suttee which also lingered on in many places.

Other horrible customs such as human sacrifice, practised among certain tribes of Orissa with a view to enhancing the fertility of their fields, were stamped out by John Campbell, the Lawrence brothers and their colleagues during this period.

'What days these were!' writes one officer. 'How Henry Lawrence would send us off to great distances, Edwardes to Bunnoo, Nicholson to Peshawur, Abbott to Hazara, Lumsden somewhere else, etc., giving us a tract of country as big as half of England, and giving us no more helpful directions than these, "Settle the country; make the people happy; and take care there are no rows!"'¹ John Lawrence adopted as his motto 'the new trilogy of the British government: thou shalt not burn thy widows; thou shalt not kill thy daughters; thou shalt not bury thy lepers alive'.

'It will not be necessary to fire a gun in India for seven years to come,' Hardinge claimed with legitimate pride in 1848, when handing over office to his successor, Lord Dalhousie. Never before had the Indian Empire been in such a state of tranquillity as it then was. What appeared to be the last obstacle to its pacification had been removed. The only army capable of disturbing the peace of the country had been dissolved and the chiefs whose ambition or opposition could have created alarm had been one and all disarmed.

The prospects of a durable peace were, however, soon shattered. The Sikh aristocracy was chafing against the presence of an alien autocracy and the social and political restraints on the liberty of the people. The whole of the Punjab was soon up in arms. How the Sikhs were subdued and after them the Burmese, how many of the Indian princes were maintained on their thrones while their minions indulged in misgovernment and oppression, how the territories of other princes came to be annexed, is known to every student of Indian history. We may remind ourselves, however, of a few of the more notable achievements in the sphere of administration at the mid-century.

An elaborate system of communications coupled with one of irrigation was found to be the best means of averting the recurring threat of famine. The extension of the Grand Trunk Road, the great arterial highway across India, was therefore vigorously pushed on from Lahore to Peshawar, and resulted in a great increase in trade. Another means of communication, railways, had a special appeal for Lord Dalhousie, the new

¹ H. Edwardes: *Memorials*, ch. i, p. 58.

Governor-General, as he had been President of the Board of Trade in England and had taken a prominent part in the development of the British railway system before he came out to India. The first section of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway was completed from Bombay to Thana in 1853; and before Dalhousie retired three years later he had hundreds of miles under construction. Regular telegraphic communication was established between Calcutta, Madras, Agra and Peshawar. Under the old rudimentary system the postage on a letter sent from Bombay to Calcutta cost one rupee: under the system introduced by Dalhousie it cost less than half an anna. To the poor this was a great boon, and it gave impetus to the circulation of newspapers from one end of the country to the other.

Irrigation was another boon; and proposals for the construction of canals found in Dalhousie an enthusiastic supporter. The construction of the Bari Doab Canal, completed in 1859, was sanctioned by Dalhousie; that of the Upper Coleroon Dam, the Godavari works and the Krishna River Canal fell to the lot of General Sir Arthur Cotton, the Grand Old Man of Irrigation as he was called. Cotton continuously pleaded for an extensive programme of irrigation, but the authorities seemed to favour the construction of railways more than canals. After his retirement, Cotton challenged the wisdom of this decision at meetings of the East India Association, which was founded in London in the year 1867 to provide a forum for discussion on Indian affairs. 'If India could be irrigated with ink, the famines would have been stopped long ago,' he observed sarcastically at one of the meetings,¹ commenting on the official correspondence on the subject, but he 'would have preferred a Governor-General or head of a public works department who would irrigate one acre or cut one mile of irrigation to one who would write a Blue Book full of frothy declamation about the necessity of irrigation and the terrible difficulties attending it'.

Macaulay, in laying the foundations of a system of national education for India, had based his hopes on the theory of 'infiltration'. It was expected that the knowledge gained by the upper classes in educational institutions run on Western

¹ Proceedings of the East India Association, vol. XXVI.

lines would filter down to the masses through the vernaculars. But in practice it did not work. The ignorance of the bulk of the population was still appalling. Under Dalhousie's inspiration, schemes to stimulate the education of children, the inspection of schools and the award of scholarships were drawn up. It was arranged to maintain at government expense one school in each district to serve as a model to others. In 1854 a despatch embodying the findings of a committee of inquiry into the problem of Indian education was prepared by Sir Charles Wood. The extension of European knowledge throughout all classes was laid down as the object of the Committee. This object was to be effected through the medium of the English language in the higher branches of instruction and through the Indian vernaculars for the great mass of the people. Upon the Government of India was imposed the task of constituting in each presidency a Department of Public Instruction and an organized system of education, universities in the presidency towns, and training colleges, of maintaining and increasing government colleges and high schools, and providing vernacular schools with scholarships and grants-in-aid. The importance of educating girls was particularly stressed as a means of influencing the national character. Although for the country as a whole these proposals appeared to be far too ambitious and impracticable, yet among advanced communities in provinces such as Bombay, a beginning had already been made, independently of the Government, particularly in the education of girls. Another interesting feature of the Committee's report is its emphasis, at so early a stage in the educational history of the country, on the need for establishing technical, engineering and agricultural colleges.

Dalhousie was delighted in taking immediate steps to implement the recommendations of the Committee. In proposing, welcoming and inaugurating all such reforms, as in annexing Indian states and extending the frontiers of the empire, the underlying principle and aim of this enlightened ruler was the unity of the country and the transformation of a heterogeneous and divided people into a nation. When in 1856 he left the shores of India, it seemed that the night of intrigue, revolution, anarchy, robbery, murder, plunder and misery was

over. The day of justice, law, order, and protection of public and private rights was at hand. Who could have dreamt that within a few weeks the rulers bent on improving the lot of the people in divers spheres of social welfare would be overwhelmed by the unparalleled tragedy known in history as the Indian Mutiny of 1857?

The Sceptre passes to the Crown

TO FEAR GOD and have no other fear is a maxim of religion, but the truth of it and the wisdom of it are proved day by day in politics.' In thus proclaiming the principle underlying all the measures he undertook in discharging his duties towards the people committed to his care, Dalhousie knew he had nothing to hide or fear. It was an irony of fate, however, that soon after the stalwart, stricken by illness, staggered on board the ship that was to carry him home, there to die in the prime of life, not only his conquests and annexations but also his epoch-making reforms were indiscriminately criticized as the principal factors contributing to the Sepoys' Revolt.

Doubtless there was an almost unprecedented ferment among certain sections of the people when Dalhousie laid down the reins of office. There was resentment amongst the chiefs whose territories had passed to the Company by conquest or annexation under the policy of lapse. Also there was uneasiness among the Indian population generally, wedded as it was to ancient traditions, beliefs and customs, no matter how superstitious, injurious or barbarous. Several of Dalhousie's reforms appeared to strike at the root of Hinduism and family life. It was a fixed belief that the Brahmin was a law unto himself, that widows should be burnt with their deceased husbands and certainly that they could not remarry. But the Act of 1856 legalized the remarriage of widows, and the civil rights of converts from Hinduism were recognized. In railway trains Brahmins had to rub shoulders with men of inferior castes; in jails prisoners of superior castes had to submit to a common messing system; and what incensed the upper classes most was the idea that a respectable zamindar could be dragged to a court of law by a *sudra* or any artisan. Beneficial, just and justifiable though the

reforms were, their introduction in such rapid succession gave rise to a general feeling of uneasiness and insecurity. There was also unrest among a section of the soldiery who found it hard to reconcile allegiance to their masters with loyalty to their creed or caste, and not a few of them dreaded the loss of caste involved in complying with some of the new army regulations. Some of the British officials feared that in a country so conservative as India, Dalhousie's dictum to fear God and have no other fear, not even of offending the susceptibilities of the army, was a dangerous doctrine. Thus various factors contributed to the prevailing unrest, and as the Sepoys' Revolt followed immediately after Dalhousie relinquished office, it was easy enough at the time to trace the whole trouble to his régime. That is understandable, but to describe the revolt as a national war for freedom and independence, waged by a populace groaning under a sense of injustice and aggression, is nothing short of a travesty of history.

A significant fact to be remembered is that out of the millions affected by Dalhousie's policy, a comparatively small number of sepoys actually took part in the insurrection and only a few dispossessed chiefs and other disaffected civilians actively assisted the rebels. On the other hand a large majority of the subjugated chiefs and people not only remained loyal in the hour of trial but proved able allies of the British in suppressing the revolt. The so-called War of Independence was absolutely unorganized and unplanned, and was confined to a few areas; its back was broken within four months. The rebellious sepoys, having no political leaders or agitators in their midst, were ignorant of political rights and wrongs, and had not the slightest idea or desire of achieving either national freedom or economic independence. They were moved solely by resentment against the restrictions on their religious practices and against regulations affecting their terms of service.

Past experience should have warned against the danger of tampering with the religious practices of the Indian soldiers. In 1824 one of the regiments at Barrackpore had refused to embark for Burma and had to be fired on and broken up by artillery; and there had been other cases of mutiny in the

army. Dalhousie cannot be held to have ignored the lessons of these revolts: remembering the Barrackpore massacre, he actually averted a mutiny in 1852 by tactfully handling the situation when the 38th Native Infantry likewise refused to go to Burma by sea. The battalion had expressed its readiness to march anywhere by land and, being as good a statesman as he was a soldier, he thought it right that it should march to Dacca, there to relieve a unit which had no such scruples in sailing for Burma.

The Brahmin sepoys, it was believed, were a particular source of trouble. They were notorious for desertion and for providing the secret springs of mutiny. Sagacious rulers such as Munro and Elphinstone had warned during the early years of the century that if the delicate machine of the army was not carefully and skilfully handled, the sepoys would turn against their officers. Reference has already been made to Elphinstone's opinion that even if the British Empire in India escaped the danger of Russian and other foreign attacks, the seeds of its destruction might be found in the army. Munro also feared that once the sepoys lost respect for their officers, they would rise against the Government, not in order to assert national liberty, but for plunder. At the end of Dalhousie's régime the bonds of respect and loyalty between the rank and file and its officers were certainly not as strong as they had previously been.

The sudden rebellion of the Santals, in 1855, showed that trouble was brewing outside the army also. This race of gentle aborigines had become entangled in debt owing to alienation of their lands. Without warning they swept over the outlying regions of Bengal, arrived within a hundred miles of Calcutta, massacred Europeans and Indians alike and set fire to huts and bungalows. Their rebellion taught the rulers 'a new and cogent lesson'. 'I trust very much,' wrote Dalhousie, 'that Her Majesty's ministers and those who talk of drawing troops from India so glibly and confidently . . . will lay that lesson to heart.' Is it likely that he himself ignored the lesson, as is wantonly suggested by some critics?

When Lord Canning took over from Dalhousie, he had no apprehension whatever of the untoward consequences of the

reforms introduced during the previous régime. On the contrary, he had good reason to hope, and his hopes were shared by many in India as well as in England, for a comparatively peaceful tenure of office. But although the sky seemed quite clear to him, seasoned statesman and keen student of history that he was, he considered it advisable to sound a note of caution. On leaving London for India, he said to the Directors of the Company: 'In the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud may arise, at first no bigger than a man's hand, but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst and overwhelm us with ruin.'¹ These words proved strangely prophetic.

When it was announced, by the Governor-General's orders on 25 July 1856, that all units would be thenceforth liable for general service beyond the seas and that refusal on the ground of caste inhibition would be regarded as mutiny, there was much consternation amongst the troops. The order seemed to lend confirmation to the rumour that the Government was planning to break down the caste system and deal a death blow to Hinduism. The Bengal sepoy were predominantly Brahmins and high-caste Rajputs. To these spirited men, swayed as they were by exaggerated notions of superiority of birth and loyalty to ancestral faith and customs, the new regulations were particularly galling. British control over them had been weakening for some time, and many of their most capable and valiant officers had been drafted to serve in the Crimea or as governors and advisors elsewhere and had not been replaced despite the protests of Dalhousie. Moreover, almost all the European troops were concentrated in the Punjab, and the heart of the country was occupied by sepoy regiments. Also, there was a legend current at the time, notably in the army, of a prophecy based on a reading of the stars by the astrologers which said that the end of the Company's rule was drawing nigh.

A crisis was threatened and tension ran high. The sepoys became defiant and truculent. Only a spark was needed to ignite the storehouse of sedition. The spark came with the rearming of the sepoys with a new rifle which required a greased cartridge. The end of the cartridge had to be bitten off, and it was

¹ H. G. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.



JUSTICE.

The aftermath of the Mutiny, as seen by Punch

rumoured that the lubricant used was cow's fat, which would defile every Hindu who touched it. Later, the outcry was against the use of pig's fat, thus inflaming the Muslim sepoys also. The agitation spread with lightning speed. There were numerous cases of insubordination. A sepoy attacked the adjutant of his regiment while the quarter-guard looked on. Then, in May 1857, after a prolonged punishment parade at which a number of sepoys were stripped of their military badges and put in irons, the regiments broke into open revolt, slew some of their officers, released the prisoners and marched to Delhi to tender their services to the descendant of the Mogul emperor residing in the palace fort, still retaining the imperial title. What followed is known to every student of history.

It was on both sides a war of fear, hate and rage. Though assailed suddenly by superior numbers, the British fought steadily back: even before reinforcements from England arrived, Delhi was recovered and the progress of the mutineers checked, until by the end of the year hardly a Bengal sepoy regiment survived. A remarkable feature of the insurrection was that the Bombay and Madras armies were scarcely affected at all. Only in rare cases was there a stir among them, as for instance at Jhansi where a disappointed rani (in Oudh, a discontented landlord) added fuel to the fire. The Sikhs helped their erstwhile conquerors to subdue the sepoys; and the princes, too, in general refrained from lending their support to the rebels and rendered memorable assistance in suppressing the revolt. Had the Sikh, Maratha and Rajput states, particularly Hyderabad, been disloyal, or had they espoused the cause of the deposed descendant of the Moguls, Bahadur Shah, the whole country would have been overrun and dominated by the mutineers. It was the loyalty of these states that turned the scale in favour of the British.

As soon as organized resistance had ceased, Canning advocated a return to normal methods of justice and good government. Indiscriminate execution of innocent and guilty alike should, he insisted, be stopped. But the fierce passions excited in the British community had not yet spent their force; loud protests were raised and a petition was sent to Queen Victoria

for the withdrawal of 'Clemency' Canning. The courageous satrap, however, stuck to his guns. To Lord Granville he wrote : 'Whilst we are prepared, as the first duty of all, to strike down resistance without mercy, wherever it shows itself, we acknowledge that, resistance over, deliberate justice and calm, patient reason are to resume their sway.' To Queen Victoria he wrote : 'There is a rabid and indiscriminate vindictiveness abroad, even amongst many who ought to set a better example, which it is impossible to contemplate without a feeling of shame for one's countrymen.' In his sovereign he found a willing supporter. 'Lord Canning will easily believe,' she graciously replied, 'how entirely the Queen shares his feeling of sorrow and indignation at the unchristian spirit shown, alas, to a great extent here by the public towards India in general.'¹

The shock the Mutiny gave to the British Government had its compensation. It was felt in responsible quarters that the dual system of government initiated in 1784 should be abolished and that the task of government should be transferred from the Company to the Crown. There were remonstrances from the Directors; but the Company's days were numbered. Under the Act for the better government of India, passed on 2 August 1858, the President of the Board of Control was replaced by the Secretary of State for India with a council consisting of retired officials. The Court of Directors of the Company thereupon offered the empire to the Queen in terms worth recalling : 'Let Her Majesty appreciate the gift; let her take the vast country and the teeming millions of India under her direct control; but let her not forget the great Corporation from which she has received them, and the lessons to be learnt from its success.'

At a durbar at Allahabad, Canning published the Queen's proclamation appointing him first Viceroy and Governor-General. It proclaimed a free pardon to all except those convicted of having directly taken part in the murder of British subjects. To the princes who had remained loyal during the upheaval an assurance was given that there would be no encroachment on their territory, personal rights or privileges.

¹ *ibid.*, p. 104.



TOO "CIVIL," BY HALF.

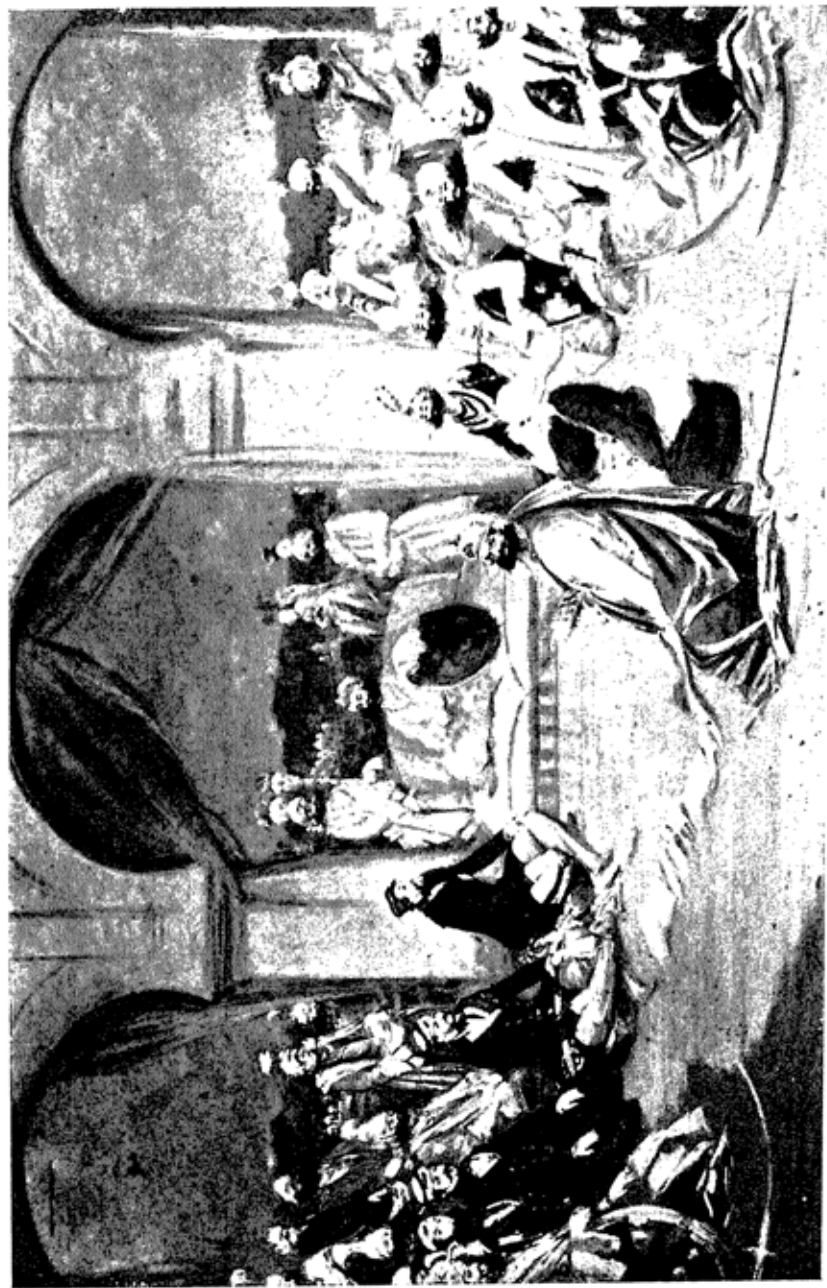
The Governor-General Defending the POOR Sepoy.

'Clemency Canning', the Punch view

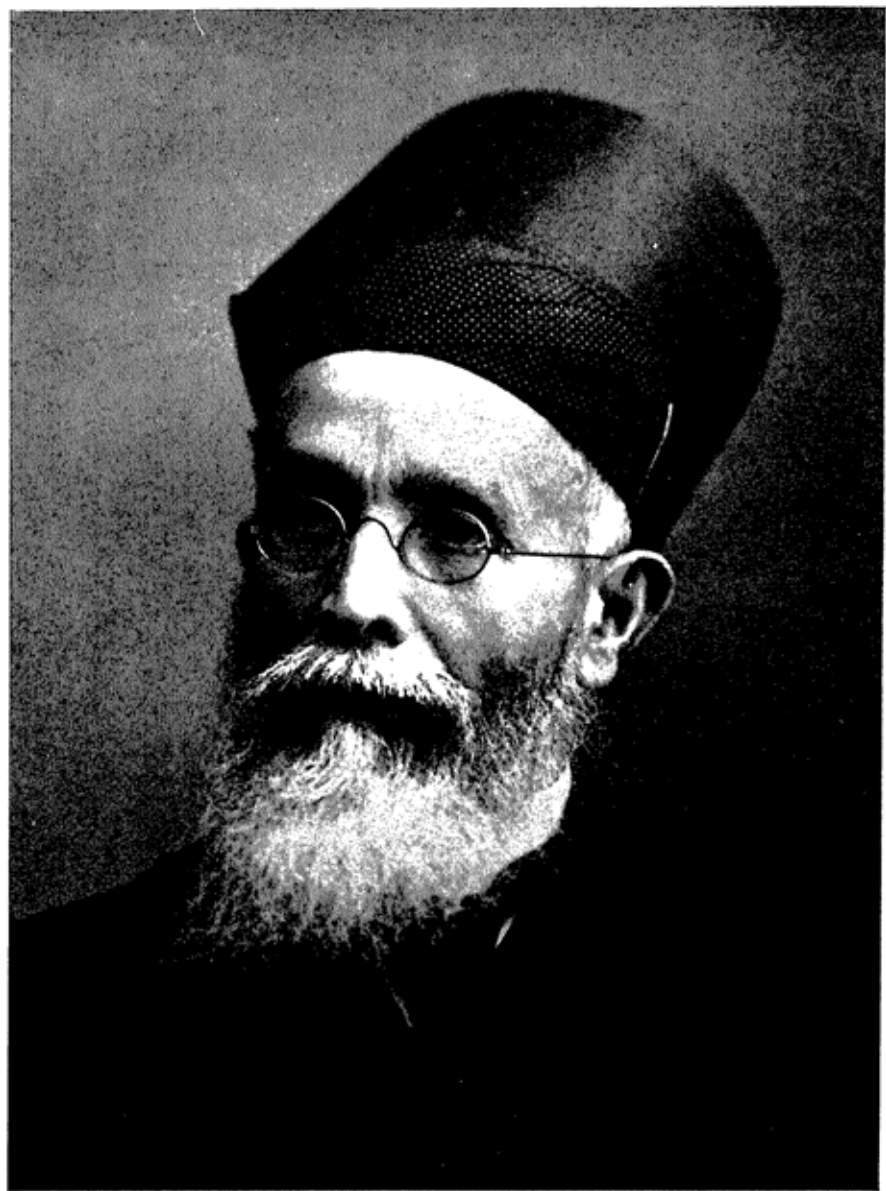
Complete freedom of religion was promised to all. The proclamation ended with an expression of the gracious sovereign's earnest desire to govern the country for the benefit of her subjects resident therein. 'In their prosperity will be our strength, in their contentment our security and in their gratitude our best reward.'

There was rejoicing throughout the land, the jubilation of the heirs of the Indian ruling families being the greatest. All treaties made with them by the Company were to be maintained; their rights and dignity were to be honoured. A year later, when Canning announced at another great durbar that the rule against the adoption of heirs was to be relaxed, and when sanads, or formal instruments, were issued to the leading princes recognizing the right of adoption, they felt convinced that the Government had, formally, finally abandoned a policy which would have led to their extinction. The ties of friendship thus formed lasted until the withdrawal of the British in 1947.

It was a long time before the last smouldering embers of the conflagration could be extinguished and measures of precaution taken to avoid all risk of recurrence. Numerous problems created by the disturbance had to be solved: the army had to be reconstructed in the light of the bitter experience gained; the public services needed reorganization; the shattered finances had to be rehabilitated and the financial machinery reformed; various measures had to be launched to ensure tranquillity and contentment among the people, to promote rural welfare and prosperity and to ensure swift redress of legal wrongs and justice to all seeking protection in the courts of law. In particular, we cannot pass over a monumental reform for education which was undertaken during these months of strain and anxiety. Even in normal times, this reform would have been regarded as an exemplary act of justice and good government on the part of the alien bureaucracy. As it was, the institution of three universities, undertaken while the Sepoys' Revolt was at its height, is an event unique in the annals of subject nations. It reflects one of the finest traits in the British character and affords a striking illustration of Canning's great patience and perseverance. In the midst of the



'Durbar at Oodeypore', 1855. Henry Lawrence, in front of the pillar, is the chief guest



Dadabhai Naoroji, 1825-1917, 'the Grand Old Man of India'

struggle, a meeting of the Executive Council was summoned to discuss the legislation necessary for establishing universities at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay on the lines of the University of London.

The minutes of earlier rulers such as Lord Hastings, Munro and Mountstuart Elphinstone had paved the way for the Indianization of the services. In his exposition of the Act of 1833, throwing open to Indians all offices under the East India Company, Macaulay had stated in the House of Commons that even at the risk of being labelled a philosopher, an appellation regarded, by men of selfish hearts and contracted minds, as the most opprobrious of all, he would to the last day of his life feel proud of having been one of those who had assisted in framing the enactment.

Meanwhile it was taken for granted that the benevolent despotism would continue. This despotism was, in the opinion of even so ardent an advocate of liberalism as James Mill, better than most of the despotisms recorded in history. Both Macaulay and Mill believed, however, that it could be made better still by grafting on to it 'those blessings which are the natural fruits of liberty'. The only really good government was representative government, and the anomaly of a benevolent despotism under the ægis of a liberal-minded nation could only be resolved by a lengthy process of education. The new universities were symbolic of the sustained interest in this creed.

On 12 March 1862, Canning laid down office, crippled in heart by the loss of his wife a few months before. None of his predecessors had been faced with so overwhelming a burden as fell to his lot; none had shown such serene courage or humanity as he had during the darkest hours of the tragedy of 1857, nor had any shown the same sense of justice. He was succeeded by Lord Elgin, whose régime was brief and uneventful.

On the morning of 30 November 1863, John Lawrence, the experienced district officer and friend of the Indian peasant, the saviour of the Punjab during the Sepoys' Revolt, who had held the office of Lieutenant-Governor of the province and who for four years had been a member of the Secretary of State's Council under Sir Charles Wood, was at work in the India

Office when Wood entered his room and said : 'You are to go to India as Governor-General. Wait here until I return from Windsor with the Queen's approval.'¹ During the seventy-seven years since the appointment of Cornwallis none outside the charmed circle of the peerage had been appointed Governor-General of India, except for temporary vacancies. The appointment of Lawrence was an exception, and it was felt in all quarters that no happier choice could have been made.

Russia's advance in the heart of Asia was considered a very serious menace to the Indian empire. Members of the 'forward school' clamoured for military operations to counteract the Muscovite advance and to strengthen the influence and power of England in Afghanistan and Iran. Lawrence, however, refused to be stampeded into military action. Should a foreign power, such as Russia, ever seriously think of invading India from without or, what was more probable, of stirring up the elements of disaffection and anarchy within, Britain's safest policy and strongest security would, he conceived, be found to lie in her abstinence from entanglement in Kabul, Kandahar or any similar outpost, and in reliance on a compact, highly equipped and disciplined army within India. The safety of the empire in India unquestionably lay, to quote his own words, 'in the contentment, if not in the attachment, of the masses; in the sense of security of title and possession, . . . and in a trust in the rectitude and honesty of our intentions, coupled with the avoidance of all sources of complaint which either invite foreign aggression or stir up restless spirits to domestic revolt.'²

Lord Mayo, Lawrence's successor, also followed a policy of non-interference in the affairs of Afghanistan. His success in balancing the budget, for the first time since the days of Dalhousie, was a great achievement. He made fixed grants to each province for a period of five years and transferred the administration of the public services to the provincial governments, giving them authority to raise local taxes. The

¹ R. Bosworth Smith : *Life of Lord Lawrence* (5th edition), vol. II, p. 385.

² *ibid.*, p. 586.

Governor-General was prepared to respect the rights and privileges of the rulers of the Indian states, if they in turn were mindful of the rights and privileges of their subjects. The Crown was prepared to support the princes in power, but in return it demanded law and order and justice. Mysore was a remarkable instance of the effectiveness of this policy. Directly under British administration from the year 1831, it was restored to the rule of the Maharaja in 1881, and its loyalty (and of Baroda, Hyderabad and other Indian states) during the two world wars was one of the most impressive features of India's participation in the war effort.

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The Growth of Indian Nationalism

HISTORIANS generally trace the beginnings of Indian nationalism to the days of Lord Ripon's viceroyalty, to his famous resolution of 1882 on local self-government and to the inauguration of the Indian National Congress in the year 1885. Some go back further, to the 'thirties of the nineteenth century when the policy of educating the people in the English language was adopted. Its origin can, however, be traced even to the early years of that century, when the duty of educating the people generally and of contributing to intellectual progress was first (in 1813) officially recognized. The most remarkable Indian of those days was Ram Mohan Roy, who might well be called the father of modern India. He was a fervent advocate of English education; even before Macaulay wrote his famous minute he had been a pioneer of social and religious reform, and was the first high-caste Hindu to visit England. He started the first Bengali newspaper in India, protested boldly against the expulsion of an English journalist from the country by the then Governor-General, fought for the freedom of the press and upheld the political rights of the people.

The growing demand of the people to be freely and impartially associated with the administration of the country created a profound impression on a few liberal-minded Englishmen. John Bright protested in the House of Commons against the policy of governing India in a spirit of monopoly and exclusion. He sounded the warning that such a policy would lead to dangerous agitation and that what would then be gratefully accepted as a boon would in a few years be wrested as a right. Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858 to the princes, chiefs and people of India, therefore laid down once more that so far as possible her subjects 'should be freely admitted to

office regardless of race or caste, in her service, the duties of which they might be qualified by their education, ability and integrity duly to discharge'. The Sepoys' Revolt of 1857 showed up the deplorable lack of contact and understanding between the common man and the authorities. The rulers had failed to keep in touch with Indian public opinion and political pulsations. This failure was not the cause of the disaffection in the Army, but it made the thoughtful among the British statesmen realize the need for close co-operation between the people and the Government in framing legislative measures affecting the social, religious and political institutions. Speaking of the prevailing system, Sir Bartle Frere wrote in 1860: 'Government can rarely learn how its measures will be received or how they are likely to affect even its European subjects until criticism takes the form of settled and often bitter opposition.' It was foolish, indeed, to legislate for millions of people 'with few means of knowing except by a rebellion whether the laws suited them or not'.¹ It was decided, therefore, to extend the process of enlarging the Governor-General's Council for legislative purposes.

In 1861 the Indian Councils Act was passed, an important landmark in India's political history although its significance as the first step taken on what was eventually to be the road to self-government was not then fully realized. The Charter Acts of 1813, 1833, and 1853 were all cautious measures, and this new enactment heralding the dawn of representative government was an even more cautious measure, its sponsors having no vision of a self-governing India as had Elphinstone and Lord Hastings. The move for the nomination of Indians to the councils was not intended as a step in the direction of real representative government. In fact, in introducing the Bill in the House of Commons, the Secretary of State, Sir Charles Wood, observed: 'You cannot possibly assemble at any place in India persons who shall be the real representatives of the native population of that empire.'² Sir Bartle Frere indicated

¹ Quoted in *The (Montagu-Chelmsford) Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms*, 1918, cmd. 9109, § 60.

² *Hansard*, vol. clxii (1861), p. 641.

what the proposed councils were intended to be when he likened the functions of the councils to those of the *darbar* of an Indian prince — merely a channel through which the ruler might learn how the measures he proposed to take were likely to affect his subjects, so that he might have an inkling of discontent before it became disaffection.¹

The Council of 1853 consisted of officials only, but being British they were parliamentarians by tradition and their proceedings were modelled more or less on the British parliamentary system. Their functions were not only legislative: they could raise questions about policy and the actions of the executive government, and criticize them. The Act of 1861, however, put a stop to this prerogative, and ruled out the transaction of any business in the new councils other than the consideration and enactment of legislation. To the British statesmen of 1861, parliamentary government in India seemed as far off as it had during the early years of the century. Even so advanced a political thinker and historian as James Mill, who had maintained that no nation which had not a representative legislature chosen by universal suffrage enjoyed security against oppression, held the same view. When he was asked before the Parliamentary Committee of 1832 whether he considered representative government practicable in India, he replied: 'Utterly out of the question.' His son, John Stuart Mill, the greatest political philosopher of the time, took for granted in his famous treatise on representative government that India was not in a sufficiently advanced state to be fitted for representative government. Not that he did not share the liberal outlook and advanced views of statesmen such as Munro, Elphinstone and Macaulay; but he ruled out the possibility of representative government of the Western type, suggesting that good government in India could be attained through 'far wider political conceptions than merely English or European practice can supply, and through a much more profound study of Indian experience, and of the conditions of Indian government, than either English politicians, or those who supply the English

¹ Montagu-Chelmsford Report, § 60.

public with opinions, have hitherto shown any willingness to undertake'.¹

The distinctive prerequisites of representative government as it operated in the West were a sufficiently educated electorate and a homogeneous society, neither of which was as yet forthcoming in India. The progress of education was producing a gradually increasing number of middle class intelligentsia, but the vast mass of the population was still illiterate. In course of time ignorance and illiteracy could be successfully combated; but to expect homogeneity among a people divided into so many castes and sub-castes, with their various and rigid customs, seemed far too optimistic even to the most friendly politicians of the day. Even to a mind as liberal as that of John Bright, keenly interested in the agitation of patriotic Indians for redress of their country's wrongs and the assertion of their rights as British subjects, it seemed that the attainment of India's freedom would take generations.

It is strange that so sympathetic a friend of India as Bright, with his faith in the fruits of liberal education and of training in democracy, should have so underrated the power of education in English and of English thought and institutions, for this type of education had, in fact, already brought about a transformation in Indian society. True, the masses were still completely illiterate. The divisions of caste and creed, the segregation of millions of untouchables, the superstitious beliefs and customs prejudicial to the furtherance of liberal education, all militated against the growth of a sense of common citizenship and interests. But the process of enlightenment had commenced. Moreover, had Bright studied the early history of India, with its examples of local and republican government which existed long before self-governing institutions were evolved in Europe, had the literary and epigraphic evidence of the existence of such institutions in various parts of Ancient India been available in his day, he would surely not have taken so despondent a view of the prospects for democratic government under the inspiration and quickening influence of such

¹ *Considerations on Representative Government* (3rd edition, 1894 printing), pp. 319-20, 322, 337.

great figures as Gladstone, Cobden, Herbert Spencer, Mill and Carlyle, who were revolutionizing society with a new spirit of liberalism.

Victorian India was in fact making phenomenal progress in imbibing ideas of political freedom and the principles of democratic and constitutional government. A single, strong and stable government was now controlling, directly or indirectly, the administration of the whole country. The provinces were acquiring a coherent and individual character, and the heterogeneous groups spread among the different provinces were undergoing a process of unification. Although the masses still remained ignorant and inert, the educated classes were becoming conscious of a kinship partly of blood, partly of close and prolonged association in the common interest, and were drawing closer together under the unifying influence of material betterment, Western education, the English language and English law. The railways made it possible for educated Indians to travel swiftly over vast distances, and they could communicate with one another by post at remarkably cheap rates. Newspapers and books in English, and in the regional languages, circulating throughout India, supplemented the work of the educational institutions and facilitated the forging of new links between one part of the country and another. Indians visited Europe in increasing numbers and brought back with them fresh ideas on the principal tenets of liberalism, nationalism and democracy.

The cultural and political institutions of England and the advantages of parliamentary government, in which Britain had taken the lead and excelled, made a profound impression on Indian visitors to Westminster. Their aspirations to democratic government received fresh impetus from such contacts and they became convinced that if the British people remained true to themselves, true to their traditions of liberty and justice, they would help India in her effort to attain similar institutions.

The foremost among Indian intellectuals to cherish such hopes was Dadabhai Naoroji, a Parsi who had been resident in England for more than a decade. Dadabhai felt that to accelerate economic and political progress in India it was essential to educate the British public in India's true condition and in

England's duty towards her people. The policy of the alien Government was certainly not such as to stimulate such hopes; the arrogance of the British officials and their attitude as a class ruled out any cause for optimism. Who, however, were the real rulers of India? The people of England, who governed India as well as England. If the policy of the Government of India had not been directed in the past towards the end visualized by Dadabhai it was because, he felt, the British public were not kept sufficiently well informed of the true state of affairs. If their ignorance were dispelled, their insular prejudices removed, the mists of misunderstanding cleared away, the ties between the two countries would be strengthened to the lasting advantage of both. 'We Indian people believe,' he used to tell English audiences, 'that, although John Bull is a little thick-headed, once we can penetrate through his head into his brain that a certain thing is right and proper to be done, you may be quite sure that it will be done.'

Such being his reading of the English mind and character, it became his lifelong mission to awaken the British people to their responsibilities in the administration of India. Already he had launched his campaign for the removal of various economic and social wrongs, and had succeeded. It was, however, impossible for him, single-handed, to rivet the attention of the British public on the many diverse and neglected political problems affecting the welfare of the Indian people. In order to diffuse knowledge of Indian affairs and create a healthy public opinion in England it was necessary to have a group of workers. Without some co-operation from British allies the need for Indian reforms could not be adequately impressed on the public, or on the members of the House of Commons in whom rested the ultimate authority. Dadabhai therefore started, in collaboration with W. C. Bonnerjee, the London Indian Society, with the object of bringing Englishmen and Indians together at social gatherings to exchange views on subjects connected with India. There were two interesting self-denying ordinances: the Society could not discuss 'any purely religious subject', nor could it at any time pledge itself to any party, political or social, in India or in England. Thus protected from pitfalls, the London

Indian Society carried on useful propaganda for more than fifty years, with Dadabhai as its President until his retirement from England in 1907.¹

In course of time it became necessary to found another organization more broad-based than the London Indian Society which could bring together Englishmen and Indians on a common platform not only for the ventilation of Indian grievances but also for the removal of erroneous impressions. Accordingly, on 1 December 1866, the East India Association was inaugurated in collaboration with a committee of retired English officers who had been thinking independently of the desirability of acquainting the British public and Government with matters pertaining to the East Indies. Its membership was thrown open to all interested in the welfare of India. Independent, disinterested advocacy in the interests of India and the promotion of her welfare by all legitimate means were its avowed objects. As an institution it aimed also at providing a library and reading room, and at affording Members of Parliament and the public generally information and guidance on Indian subjects. During his stay in England Dadabhai had succeeded in arousing in English friends such deep sympathy for his country and such high regard for his labours that a large number of eminent English politicians, statesmen, ex-governors and officials resident in England readily joined the Association. Its first President was Lord Lyveden, son of Robert Smith, Advocate-General of Bengal. Smith's fame among the people of India was, to quote the words of James Mackintosh, the philosopher-lawyer of Bombay, 'greater than that of any Pandit since the days of Manu'. Himself born in Calcutta, Lord Lyveden was connected with the Board of Control, first as its Secretary and then as its President, and was keenly interested in the welfare of India. Dadabhai was at first only a member of the committee, but the duties of Secretary of the Association soon devolved on him.

The platform of the Association provided a forum for all possessed of special information or views on Indian and colo-

¹ R. P. Masani : *Dadabhai Naoroji : The Grand Old Man of India*, pp. 96-7.

nial subjects. At its meetings was always to be seen a brilliant assemblage of prominent Englishmen, Indians and Anglo-Indians, exchanging views on Indian affairs, united in voicing Indian grievances, and stimulating, so far as possible, the British public and British Government to take a deeper interest in India than they had previously evinced. Dadabhai was the outstanding figure at these gatherings. At the very first meeting held on 2 May 1867, he read a paper on 'England's Duties to India'. His enthusiasm proved infectious. Member after member read papers on such important subjects as irrigation and the admission of Indians to the Civil Service. Within two years of its existence, the Association had demonstrated what a wide field of useful work lay before it. Dadabhai was deputed to India to establish branches of the Association and collect funds.

Gradually the influence of the Association began to be felt in Parliament. Henry Fawcett, dubbed 'the Member for India', had begun what became the annual custom of moving a resolution in the House of Commons favouring 'simultaneous examinations' for recruitment to the Indian Civil Service. Whenever Indian questions were discussed in Parliament, several M.P.s prompted by members of the Association, or inspired by its discussions, spoke with knowledge of the wants and wishes of the people and brought informed criticism to bear on the solutions of Indian problems.

Soon after the Councils Act of 1861, several steps were initiated by Lord Mayo to train the people in the field of local government and to liberalize the machinery of rural and urban administration. The results were not encouraging. Official interference, though well meant and based on grounds of efficiency, made progress impossible. In a few cases, however, where responsibility was thrown upon and exercised freely by local bodies, the results were gratifying. The Indianization of offices was not so simple. The bureaucracy of the day found it hard to give effect to the policy of throwing open offices of responsibility to Indians. Years later, they found it positively galling to carry out the undertaking. Of this fact Lord Lytton as Viceroy made no secret. 'No sooner was the Act (1833) passed,' he wrote in an oft-quoted confidential minute, 'than

the Government began to devise means for practically evading the fulfilment of it. We have had to choose between prohibiting them and cheating them and we have chosen the least straightforward course. . . . I do not hesitate to say that both the Government of England and of India appear to me up to the present moment unable to answer satisfactorily the charge of having taken every means in their power of breaking to the heart words of promise they have uttered to the ear.'

Lord Ripon extended the measures initiated by Lord Mayo. A liberal-minded statesman and disciple of Mill, he felt that the extension of self-government in rural areas, the real foundation of constitutional progress, could no longer be delayed if responsible government was ever to be transferred to the people. Only by learning to manage their local affairs could Indians acquire the capacity and qualities for self-government in other spheres. Under his scheme for local self-government there were to be three classes of boards for local self-government: (i) municipal corporations in the cities; (ii) district boards, corresponding to the English county councils, and (iii) local boards. 'It is not primarily with a view to improvement in administration that the measure is put forward and supported,' ran the famous resolution of May 1882. 'It is chiefly desirable as a measure of political and popular education. His Excellency in Council has no doubt that, in course of time, as local knowledge and local interest are brought to bear more freely on local government, improved efficiency will in fact follow.'

The impetus thus given to the people to associate themselves with the work of administration caused consternation in Anglo-Indian circles representing the short-sighted bureaucracy of the day. The opposition to this particular reform was, however, nothing compared with the irrational and hysterical outburst of racial passion engendered by the Criminal Jurisdiction Bill which was brought forward in 1883 by Courtenay Ilbert, the Law Member of the Viceroy's Council. Under the law as it then existed no Indian judge could try a European on a criminal charge except in the presidency towns. A number of Indians were about to reach the higher ranks of the Civil Service and

it was considered necessary to confer upon them the same rights and privileges as those enjoyed by their European colleagues. To regard an Indian as an equal of his British colleague, appeared to the Anglo-Indian population, however, to be nothing short of heresy. How deeply ingrained was this conception of race superiority may be gathered from the astounding speech made in London against the Bill by Seton Kerr, formerly Foreign Secretary to the Government of India. The Bill, he declared, outraged 'the cherished conviction which was shared by every Englishman in India, from the highest to the lowest, by the planter's assistant in his lowly bungalow and by the editor in the full light of the Presidency town—from those to the Chief Commissioner in charge of an important province and to the Viceroy on his throne—the conviction in every man that he belongs to a race whom God has destined to govern and subdue.'¹ In his *Life of Lord Kitchener* Sir George Arthur quotes Lord Robert's equally emphatic views on the consciousness of such superiority. 'It is this consciousness,' Roberts said, 'of the inherent superiority of the European which has won for us India. However well educated and clever a native may be, and however brave he may have proved himself, I believe that no rank which we could bestow upon him would cause him to be considered as an equal by the British officer.'² No wonder that the most rabid anti-Indian amongst the European population raised a hue and cry against the Bill. Ripon was vilified by them more intensely than any representative of the British Government in India had ever been before by British or Indian. A protest meeting was held in the Town Hall of Calcutta. It was reported that a 'confederacy of blusterers' had been formed threatening to overpower the sentries at Government House, to put the Viceroy on board a steamer at Chandpal Ghat and to deport him to England. Thus did Englishmen in India teach the Indian leaders of political thought, hitherto steadfast in their faith in British justice, that without vigorous and country-wide agitation they could not hope to combat successfully the reactionary forces at work. Thus did the people of India learn

¹ H. Whitehead : *Indian Problems*, p. 207.

² Vol. II, p. 177.

to distinguish between the liberty-loving British nation in whose sense of justice they had placed implicit faith and the British bureaucracy and community in India from whom they despaired of getting fair play. A growing section of the politically minded Indians, as yet untainted with disaffection and absolutely pro-British, began to wonder whether their political leaders had not made a fetish of British justice. They could not help feeling that the time had arrived when the Indian peoples should unite in an organized effort to obtain for themselves the freedom enjoyed by the British and the same representative and effective voice in their country's administration.

As a counterblast to the assaults on the magnanimous Viceroy and his colleagues, who had shown great forbearance under serious provocation, public meetings were held in several Indian cities. One was also held in London at Willis's Rooms, St. James's, in support of Ripon's 'native policy'. John Bright presided. In a spirited address he warned his countrymen that India was not committed to British control to be held as 'a field for English ambition and for English greed'. In Bengal a new institution, called the National League, was started in 1884. This, with the formation of the Madras Mahajan Sabha and the Bombay Presidency Association, was the prelude to joint action by all the provinces, culminating in the formation of the Indian National Congress on 27 December 1885. On that memorable day seventy Indians from various parts of the country, representing different classes and communities and speaking one common language, English, met in Bombay to inaugurate the first session of the Congress. It was an extraordinary event, a spectacle of national unity, a demonstration of the people's sense of national existence and solidarity never before witnessed in the country's history. The founders of the Congress were proud to describe it as an offspring of British rule.

Phenomenal as was this manifestation of unity, even more remarkable was the fact that its principal founder was a retired British official, Allan Octavian Hume. Hume was one of the few members of the Indian Civil Service who sympathized with the people's aspirations to obtain self-government under British paramountcy. It was at his suggestion, made at the time

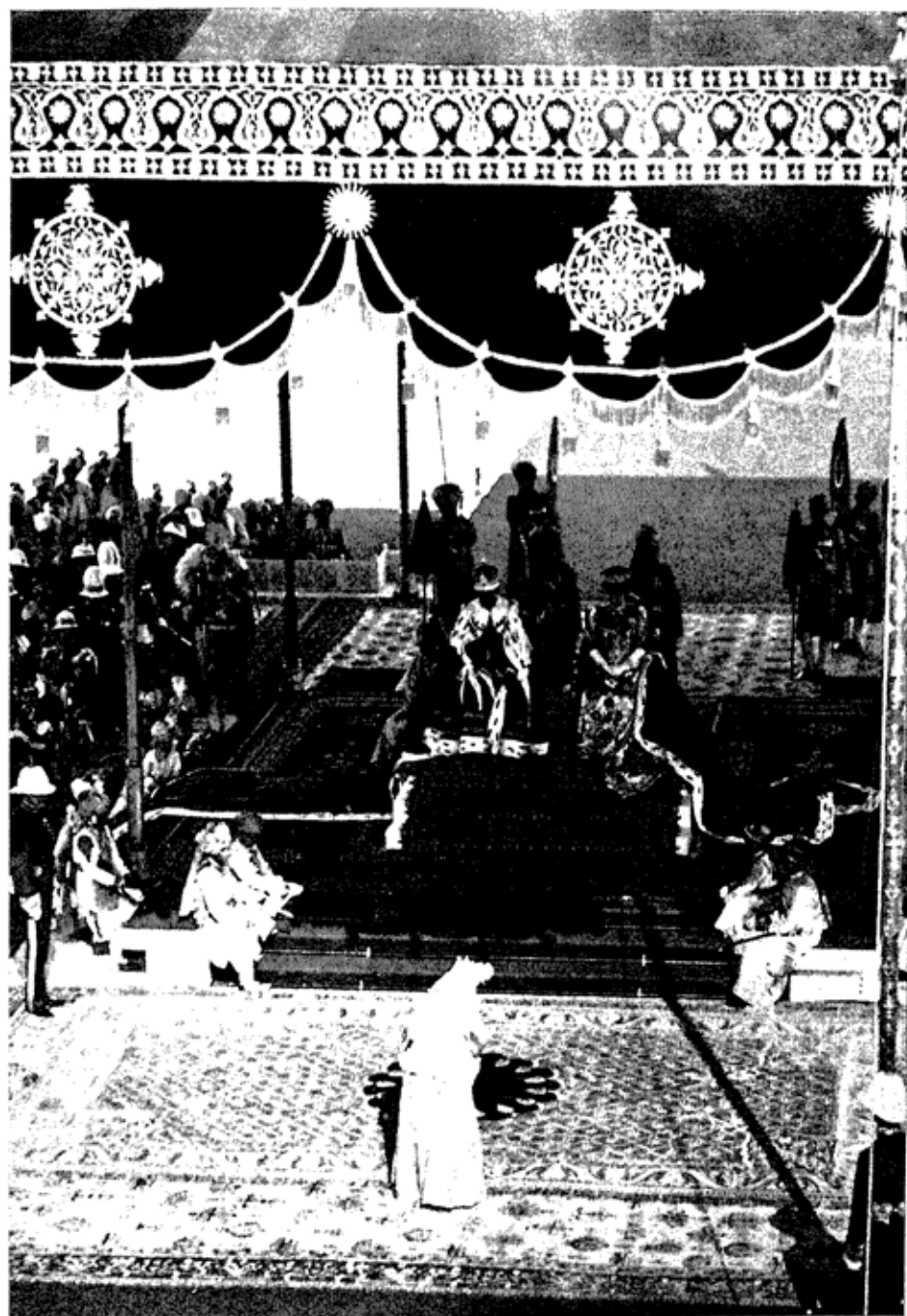
of the indignation caused by the Anglo-Indian agitation over the Ilbert Bill, that the Congress was formed to enable all workers in the national cause to get personally to know one another, to discuss amongst themselves the political problems of the country, to formulate a programme of activities from year to year and, incidentally, to form the nucleus of an Indian parliament which would in course of time prove that India was fit for any form of responsible government. Believing that the salvation of India could come only from Indians, Hume and his English colleagues, William Wedderburn, David Yule and Henry Cotton, took the initiative in giving shape and direction to Indian agitation. India's debt to these Englishmen and to Hume in particular, who devoted all his time and energy to the work of the Congress in the days of its infancy, was gratefully acknowledged by contemporary Indians but has since been forgotten. Nor have the British people ever fully realized how the part played by that sprinkling of British radicals in India should fill all Britons with pride.

As a child of the British Raj, the inauguration of the Congress was cordially welcomed by Lord Dufferin, then Viceroy of India. Having experienced the greatest difficulty in ascertaining the people's real wishes, he felt that it would be a public benefit to have some such responsible organization through which the rulers might be kept informed of Indian public opinion on matters of state. The Governor of Bombay, Lord Reay, was so sympathetic that it was suggested that he might preside at the first meeting. If Hume might be called, what in fact he was, the father of the Congress, Dufferin might well be called the godfather. In an interview he advised Hume definitely to aim at the political education of the people, and marked his approval of the movement by inviting the delegates to the second session in Calcutta as distinguished guests to a garden party at Government House. His example was followed by the Governor of Madras when the third session was held in that city. Indeed, for the time being, the entire official world appeared to consider it an excellent idea to have such an organization as a sort of constitutional opposition to the government of the day.

At the first meeting it was made very clear by the President, W. C. Bonnerjee, that the object of the Congress was to promote 'those sentiments of national unity which had their origin in our beloved Lord Ripon', and that its proceedings would be strictly constitutional. At the second session, held in Calcutta and presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji, he reiterated the avowed object of constitutional approach to the solution of such administrative problems as the enlargement of the legislative councils and the admission of Indians to the higher ranks of the Civil Service. Modest though the audiences were at the early sessions of the organization, they represented the educated classes, the cream of the population, 'the brain and conscience of the country', the natural custodians of the people's interests and their accredited spokesmen. Dufferin wanted the counsel and co-operation of the people in the task of administration. 'Now that we have educated these people,' said he, 'the desire to take a larger part in the management of their own domestic affairs seems to be a legitimate and reasonable aspiration, and I think there should be enough statesmanship among us to contrive the means of permitting them to do so without unduly compromising our imperial supremacy.'

The necessity of giving quickly and with good grace whatever might be necessary or desirable was obviously the golden rule to follow. Had not this rule been too often forgotten by Dufferin's successors and the bureaucracy, the constitutional opposition of the Congress need not have been replaced by the combative non-co-operation, passive resistance and civil disobedience which undoubtedly retarded progress, and it would not have been necessary to pay for freedom the crippling price of partition of the country.

Soon after the Madras Congress there was a rift in the lute, and the bureaucracy fell foul of the infant Hercules. To the non-official European community the growing activities of the Congress spelled disaster—subversion of the established order of things. Even some of the Parsi and Muslim members were frightened by the outcry of the organization's opponents that it aimed at transferring the government of India from the Crown to an Indian parliament and at the substitution of Hindu



The Coronation Durbar, Delhi, 1911 : 'The Homage'



The outgoing Viceroy. Lord Irwin bidding farewell to the princes



The incoming Viceroy. Lord Willingdon replying to an address of welcome

for British raj. The opponents of the Congress found aid in the report of the Madras session of the Congress itself. To this report were appended two pamphlets: *A Congress Catechism* by Veera Raghavachariar, and a Conversation between Moulvi Fariduddin (pleader of the Hakikatabad district) and one Rambukhsh (a headman of Kambakhtpur) showing by parable the evils of absentee landlordism, however benevolent, and urging that the way to escape the tyranny of a despotic government was to seek a representative one, such as that for which the Congress was contending. Thousands of copies of both pamphlets in various regional languages were circulated freely. The hostile factions read in them nothing but revolt and quoted passages to show that the Congress was fast becoming an engine for sedition. And pamphleteering was not the sole sin of the Congress. Special efforts were made to induce the Muslims to join. The appeal to Muslims by Badruddin Tyabji as President of the Madras Congress was followed by active propaganda in Urdu all over the country. A Muslim named Bhimji toured the provinces enlisting Muslim support. This was a real danger in the eyes of the bureaucracy, more unnerving than anything they had put up with hitherto. The authorities could not remain inactive when they saw good Muslims walking lightly into the Congress trap. Official and non-official influence therefore set to work to make the Muslim subjects of the Crown see through the 'seditious' movement and to inflame the whole country against the attempt to introduce a Hindu raj fatal to its interests.

The worst 'crime' of the Congress was the agitation carried on in England by Dadabhai, in the name of the Congress and on behalf of the people of India. He had succeeded in enlisting the sympathy and support of Sir William Hunter in the Congress cause. Hunter had openly declared that the political forces represented by the Congress were so great that the British Government, if it sought to thwart them, would break itself in the attempt. Dadabhai's daily propaganda and distribution of Congress literature and his forceful appeal to the sentiments and cherished principles of justice inherent in the British race considerably influenced English opinion in favour of the national movement. Already, no less an authority than Gladstone

had declared that the capital agent in finally determining the question whether the British power in India was or was not to continue would be the will of the 240 millions who inhabited the country. 'It would not do for us,' he warned his countrymen, 'to treat with contempt, or even with indifference, the rising aspirations of this great people.' There was, nevertheless, a clamour in Anglo-Indian circles that the Congress should be checked from speaking on behalf of India and misleading the British people. Writers like Theodore Beck went so far as to suggest that the time had arrived to use again the iron hand in the velvet glove to put down agitation. The officials, however, resorted to another device. In their opinion the best way to kill the Congress was to promote countrywide demonstrations against it. There were numerous Muslim organizations (*anjumans*) ready to take the lead, and several anti-Congress organizations had already been set on foot specifically for the purpose. There was a United India Patriotic Association, of which Sir Syed Ahmed was the Secretary; there was also the British Indian Association of Oudh ready to organize public meetings and hostile demonstrations in different parts of India and to denounce the Congress and challenge its right to speak on behalf of the people of the country. These societies issued tracts and pamphlets, subsidized journals and took special care to send anti-Congress literature to England for the information of Members of Parliament, English journals, and the public generally. With funds lavishly placed in its hands, the so-called Patriotic Association issued several pamphlets, one of which was entitled 'Showing the Seditious Character of the Indian National Congress and the Opinions held by Eminent Natives of India who are opposed to the Movement'. Theodore Beck was the Editor. Among the avowed contributors were some 'rajahs', intellectually cyphers, unable to write a single page of good English. There were certainly able men too, such as Sir Syed Ahmed and Syed Husain Bilgrami, both tainted with a very powerful communal bias.¹

Syed Ahmed was a patriot, pro-British but also critical, and he denounced the arrogant attitude of many Englishmen

¹ R. P. Masani, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-6.

towards Indians. He honestly believed, however, that the Congress demand for representative government in its British form spelt disaster for his community. The principle of representative government was 'the greatest and noblest lesson which India could learn from England', but he could not help thinking that it could not be applied to India as fully as in England, the population of which formed a single community. In India, where there was no fusion of the various races, where religious distinctions were overwhelming, where the progress of education among the different classes of the population was not equal or proportionate, the system of election pure and simple could not, he felt, be safely adopted. The larger communities would totally override the interests of the smaller communities. Although one can understand these sentiments and apprehensions, what Syed Ahmed failed to realize was that the Muslims, in spite of their strength in some provinces, constituted a comparatively small minority, and were weak economically and politically. To oppose the principle of majority rule was to apply the axe at the root of democracy and the constitution of the Congress itself. To overemphasize the difference between conditions in Britain and those in India would provide an excuse for putting off indefinitely India's constitutional advance. For the Congress at that time was not a political party: it was a national institution, avowedly non-communal. The concept of a free Indian nation transcended communal divisions, and whatever divisions existed might, in the course of time, have disappeared or have ceased to do with religion. Unfortunately, the Muslim opposition was allowed to gather strength. The number of Muslim delegates at the Congress sessions continued to fall from year to year until there were only 17 of them out of a total of 750. In 1906, the Muslim leaders founded the All-India Muslim League with a view to consolidating their forces. How this organization, then of little importance and still less influence, succeeded eventually in claiming a separate dominion for the Muslims, on the basis of the two-nation theory propounded by it, will be related in subsequent chapters.

Liberalizing the Administrative Machinery

DESPITE the cannonade of hostile criticism and antagonism the Congress forged ahead. Its adherence to constitutional methods of agitation won for it an increasing number of British supporters. Thanks to the intervention of those sympathizers in the British Parliament, a definite beginning was made in liberalizing the system of administration. The process culminated within three decades in the famous Montagu-Chelmsford declaration heralding the introduction of responsible government. In its early days the East India Association was instrumental in interesting the Members of the House of Commons in the problems of improving the economic and political condition of India. It could have played a glorious part in helping the national movement; but its direction gradually passed into the hands of people with not the same enthusiasm as its pioneers for Indian reforms nor the same sense of justice, nor the sagacity to realize that India's good was also England's. The exponents of the Congress cause, such as Hume and Dadabhai, therefore turned for help to personal friends in Parliament. But the number of Members really interested in Indian problems scarcely exceeded a score. Half of these were retired civil or military officers, strongly conservative, scenting danger if not sedition in any proposal for constitutional reform. Only a handful were really liberal and progressive. Of these the most ardent and active in their support of the Indian national movement were William Wedderburn, W. S. Caine and Samuel Smith.

Wedderburn was from the outset, even when he was a member of the Indian Civil Service and ostensibly a limb of the British bureaucracy, in full sympathy with India's aspira-

tions. His liberal outlook was unclouded by the befogging, deadening atmosphere of officialdom. He marred his prospects in the Service by strenuously and repeatedly advocating the amelioration of the condition of the peasantry particularly and the people generally. After his retirement in 1887, he identified himself with the Congress; and it might be said without exaggeration that from that time until the last day of his life, he toiled and lived only for India. He visited India especially to preside over the Congress session of 1889 and became the Chairman of the British Committee of the Congress set up in the same year.

W. S. Caine paid more than one visit to India to see for himself to what extent Indians were qualified for some form of self-government. The only representative institutions which then existed in India were the municipalities and other local bodies. Caine took pains to make himself conversant with the working of these institutions and returned to England convinced that on the whole these experiments in self-government were a success. To the Bombay Corporation he paid a special tribute. 'I have no hesitation in saying,' he declared, 'that both the administration and the public debates of the Bombay Municipality are equal in quality to that of Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool or Glasgow.'

A champion of the temperance movement, Samuel Smith came very early into contact with Dadabhai Naoroji and became his close and lifelong friend. With ammunition provided by Dadabhai he carried on a campaign years before the emergence of the Indian National Congress, both on the floor of the House of Commons and in the columns of journals such as the *Contemporary Review*. Similarly, Dadabhai enlisted the sympathy of Charles Bradlaugh, Henry Fawcett (both M.P.s), Sir William Hunter and the famous socialist H. M. Hyndman, who could not understand why there had been no revolution in India to overthrow British supremacy.

Encouraging messages from British sympathizers in both England and India poured in and cheered India's plenipotentiary in England, Dadabhai Naoroji. A typical message, received through his nephew, came from Hume's cousin, Robert Muller,

Surgeon-Major on the Retired List of the Bombay Army. 'Will you please tell your uncle (Dadabhai),' he wrote, 'that if there be an Englishman more than another who considers the Government of India to be "a Despotism"—I am that man! And if he will please to send me all the papers connected with the (Congress) movement, he may find me to be one of the most energetic supporters of the movement.'¹

During the first four years of the Congress, scarcely a day passed when Dadabhai was not speaking or writing to or receiving inquiries and messages from British and Indian friends, sending articles to newspapers, or addressing British audiences about the Congress, which he always introduced as a child of British rule. All this work he carried on single-handed (at a time when there were no typists or stenographers to lighten his labour), and at his personal expense. The need for establishing a political agency to represent the Congress officially in England was soon felt. Dadabhai volunteered in 1887 to act, without remuneration, as Agent to the Congress; but funds were needed to meet other expenses. William Digby, author of *Prosperous British India*, whose sympathy with and unostentatious work for India for many years was well known, drew up a clear-cut scheme for establishing such an agency. It was accordingly set up with an office in Craven Street, Strand, under his personal direction. It served not only as the Congress office in London but also did for unofficial India what the India Office did for official India in the presentation of Indian affairs to Parliament and the country. Relations were established with the associations and organizations of both the great political parties in Britain. In short, a systematic and determined attempt was made to arouse British interest and to enlist British effort in Indian affairs. Eventually, in July 1889, the British Committee of the Congress was formed in association with the Agency, with Wedderburn as Chairman.

The British Committee of the Congress was a baby which Wedderburn and Dadabhai had to nurse for many years. An annual sum was voted for its support by the 1889 Congress; but this did not suffice to meet the expenditure on the journal

¹ R. P. Masani, op. cit., p. 299.

India, which was started as its official organ, or on many other activities of the British Committee. Wedderburn's means were limited, Dadabhai's even more so, yet these two devoted servants of India bore a very large part of the financial burden, Wedderburn's share being unquestionably the larger. In 1889 it was decided that all the prominent British statesmen should be contacted with a view to interesting them in the work of the Congress. Gladstone had already expressed himself in favour of it, and this move, enlisting the sympathy of Conservatives as well as Liberals, helped further to strengthen the Congress. A delegation consisting of Surendranath Banerjea, R. N. Mudholkar, Hume and Eardley Norton toured England during the year 1890 to appeal to the British public to support the Congress in its demand for reform in the administration of India. Resolutions were adopted at several meetings in favour of the Congress proposals, particularly for a system of representative government, and petitions were sent to the House of Commons praying for the acceptance of the Congress scheme for council reform. Perhaps the most important and impressive feature of this platform campaign was the series of lectures on Indian affairs delivered in different parts of England by Charles Bradlaugh, 'the protagonist of lost causes'. Bradlaugh had already manifested his affection for India and his sympathy for her demands by attending the 1888 Congress session at Bombay and had introduced a Bill in the House of Commons for constitutional reform. He had withdrawn it, however, as Viscount Cross, then Secretary of State for India, had himself offered to bring in a Bill of his own. Bradlaugh did not live to see the promised Bill which became the Act of 1892. Compared with Bradlaugh's, it was an emasculated measure. The Congress was not satisfied, nor was the Indian public, and much criticism was directed against the provisions of the Act and the defects of the regulations framed under it. To meet the demand of the Congress, the Government of Lord Dufferin proposed that the legislative councils should be further enlarged so as to admit a higher proportion of non-official members and that while some of these would be nominated, others could be elected. Dufferin also suggested that it should be legitimate

for the councils to discuss, but not to vote on, the Budget and matters of general administration. Although anxious to enlist the co-operation of the people in the task of government, he shared the opinion of his predecessors in office that the adoption of the parliamentary system, reached by England by slow degrees and trials and the discipline of centuries, was out of the question for India.

The proposals of the Government of India were accepted by Lord Salisbury's Government except those pertaining to election. The British Government could not agree, wrote Viscount Cross, to what was in effect 'a fundamental change', without 'much more positive evidence in its favour'. Lord Lansdowne, the next Viceroy, however, continued to press for it. He found a supporter in Gladstone, who observed: 'This great and powerful engine of Government should begin to operate in India on however small a scale.' The upshot was a compromise characteristic of British politics. The Act did not provide for election, but it empowered the Governor-General in Council to make regulations for the nomination of non-official members. Taking a realistic view of the peculiar conditions of a vast Asiatic country like India, Gladstone was satisfied, even though there was to be no provision for direct election. 'I can well understand,' he said, 'the difficulties that confront us in seeking to carry out our task. . . . All other parts of the British Empire present to us a simple problem in comparison with the problem which India presents.'¹

The Congress, however, could not reconcile itself to the scheme. The councils could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be hailed as parliaments in embryo. And the fact remained that the British statesmen of the day, without exception, were as emphatic as their predecessors in 1861 in rejecting the idea of representative government of the British type for the illiterate and impoverished millions of India. An ex-Secretary of State for India, John Wodehouse Kimberley, even went so far as to ridicule the notion of parliamentary representation

¹ A. B. Keith (ed.): *Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy, 1750-1921* (Worlds Classics edition), vol. II, pp. 73-4.

for India as 'one of the wildest imaginations that ever entered the minds of men'.¹

Under the Act as finally passed, the Viceroy's Legislative Council was to have ten additional members, four selected by the provincial legislatures, one by the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce and five nominated by the Governor-General. The provincial legislatures were enlarged by the addition of twenty members each, representing municipalities, universities and commercial interests. The budget was laid on the table for discussion and the right of interpellation was allowed. Although the official majority was retained, the non-official members forming one-third of the total could thus criticize the executive. Although the Congress did not get all it wanted, it had, in a sense, triumphed in so far as its agitation had resulted in the first step being taken on the road to responsible government. Similarly, the Congress demand of Indianizing the Civil Service was partially met. A number of posts hitherto reserved for the Indian Civil Service were transferred to the Provincial Civil Service.

1892 is a year memorable in the history of India for another event. For the first time an Indian was elected by a British constituency to the House of Commons. This was Dadabhai Naoroji, the most vehement critic of British rule in India. The chances of success were slender; but his numerous British friends, whom he had made also India's friends, encouraged him in his determination to stand. The Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, ridiculed the idea. While explaining why the Conservative majority in Dadabhai's constituency had dwindled in a previous election, he asserted: 'However great the progress of mankind has been and however far we have advanced in overcoming prejudices, I doubt if we have yet got to that point of view where a British constituency would elect a black man.' Those last two words, wide of applicability to Dadabhai, whose skin was little darker than that of Salisbury himself, simply kicked Dadabhai into fame. The first to fall on Salisbury for his blazing indiscretion was John Morley, the Liberal statesman. Then came Gladstone's turn. He demanded

¹ *Hansard*, vol. cccxlii (1890), pp. 93 and 98-9.

an apology from the Prime Minister for giving deep offence to 'many millions of their fellow-countrymen in India'. From that date the chances of election of the 'Black Man' greatly improved and the contest ended in his favour.

It was not only Dadabhai's triumph : it was also the triumph of India and the Indian National Congress, and marked an epoch in the political evolution of the Indian people. His presence in the House of Commons enabled him to obtain other Members' endorsements of his several demands, such as that for holding in India and England simultaneous examinations for the selection of candidates to the Indian Civil Service. Further, his election advanced the political education of his countrymen and encouraged their aspirations to a degree greater than years of activity by the various national organizations could have achieved. The Indian people had reason to be thankful that the democratic traditions of England made such a thing possible, and it demonstrated better than official declarations the sympathies of the British electorate.

Dadabhai's success led to many victories in the historic debates raised in the House of Commons on Indian problems which he had made his own and which the Congress had brought to the fore at its annual sessions. His Bill of 1893 to provide that the first examination for appointment to the Civil Service in India should be held simultaneously in India and the United Kingdom was strictly unnecessary as it was already within the powers of the Secretary of State for India to allow such an examination. Moreover, it had not the slightest chance of acceptance. But Dadabhai's object was to raise a debate and he arranged to have a resolution tabled by Herbert Paul, a sympathetic Member. The chances of the ballot brought Paul the privilege of moving the resolution, which was seconded by Dadabhai, supported by Wedderburn and was surprisingly agreed to, after a memorable debate, thanks to active lobbying. It was a snatch vote, and it caught the Government napping. A resolution of the House of Commons was not binding on the Government of India, however, and the victory was nullified by the guerilla warfare carried on by the bureaucracy. Another victory was scored in 1894, the appointment of a Royal

Commission to inquire into the question of Indian expenditure. In the course of the Indian Budget debate Samuel Smith moved a resolution demanding such an inquiry. The Secretary of State for India was not opposed to an inquiry into the question whether an unfair share of home charges was placed on the Indian exchequer, but the issues raised pertained to matters of imperial policy with reference to India, and no House of Commons would allow a Government to shelter itself behind the report of a Committee in dealing with any question pertaining to imperial policy. He therefore suggested that the motion be withdrawn, in which case he undertook to propose the appointment of a Select Committee to report on the question. Then it occurred to him that parliamentary inquiry was not the best means of dealing with the question: accidents happened to parliaments, they lasted a number of sessions, and might suddenly come to an end. Accidents, too, happened to Members; Members of one Parliament might not be Members of the next. Would it not be more desirable to have a small but thoroughly efficient and impartial Royal Commission to inquire into the question? Accordingly, a Royal Commission was appointed with Lord Welby as Chairman and Dadabhai as one of the members.

An Era of Reforms



Lord Curzon appointed Viceroy — an Indian view, May 1900

AT THE turn of the century, the infant Hercules reached the age of adolescence. Under the stimulus of political activity in India and of certain other Asian events, notably the victory of Japan over Russia, a new generation had risen. Everywhere there was a desire to recall the country's past and to regain the place she once occupied amongst the nations of the world. There was a marked contrast between the temper and outlook of the

new generation and that of the stalwarts who had built up the national organization. Highly sensitive and touchy, holding extremist views and impatient of delay in achieving freedom, the new generation insisted on a radical change in the policy of constitutional agitation followed for more than 15 years without achieving either representative government or a change in the long-tolerated high-handedness of the bureaucracy. The elders were not unsympathetic. How could they ignore the fact that the child had outgrown the constitutional garment? Rifts in the ranks of nationalist organizations are not uncommon, splitting sooner or later into factions moderate and extremist. So it happened in the case of the Indian national movement. The moderates believed in gradualness and sought to achieve their objective by constitutional means and tentative, cautious agitation. The extremists, repudiating such methods as unending, infructuous and irritating, brushed aside all appeals to reason and discounted the dangers involved in the methods of violence and terrorism. If the moderates were the children of the British raj, which could take legitimate pride in the national movement as its offspring, the extremists were the product of English education reacting strongly to the racial arrogance and manoeuvring of an alien bureaucracy. And ambition in youth was not to be despised. Its stirrings were natural; they could not be belittled or ignored. It was the enthusiasm of youth, well directed, that had already brought about important changes in human society. Moderate leaders such as Hume, Wedderburn and Dadabhai could fully understand why the young men of the country were getting restive. It was necessary to guide them, to organize their activities and secure their participation in the national cause lest they be driven to despair and revolutionary methods. A notable manifesto issued over the signatures of the illustrious trio on 19 October 1900 was therefore addressed to the President-designate of the Congress to be held at Lahore. It reviewed the past 15 years of Congress work and noted that a very critical stage in the history of the organization, possibly a parting of the ways, had now been reached. Whether the constitutional movement could develop fully by drawing together the rulers and the ruled, thus promoting the welfare

of both India and England, or whether the efforts that had been made should end in disappointment and reaction, would depend upon the attitude and action of the Indian people. 'We, who were among its originators,' they observed, 'have now well-nigh completed our work as pioneers; we have given the lead to the younger men and must look to them to take up in larger measure the burden of the work.'¹

The Congress had tried to remove the tendency to underground discontent and secret conspiracy, which was a danger necessarily attending an administration conducted by foreigners on autocratic lines. The official attitude towards the organization had become one of disapproval and suspicion. Despite all obstacles the Congress had accomplished its main object—to obtain solidarity of public opinion and hold the field as a national representative assembly. The Congress views on questions affecting India, such as the forward policy beyond the North-West Frontier, the plague regulations, the famine grant and the financial relations of England and India, had prevailed. The Royal Commission on Public Finance had unanimously found the charges placed upon India to be unfair to the extent of a quarter of a million sterling per annum. Accepting the finding, the British Government had conceded to India a small measure of financial justice.

It was the old, old story of the shield—silver on one side and gold on the other. Much work remained to be done to present both sides to all concerned. India was lying prostrate from accumulated misfortunes: all available forces had to be brought together in order to raise her up and lead her again into paths of prosperity. The first step was to ascertain, by searching inquiry, the cause of her downfall and to devise remedies suited to her peculiar economic condition. The work in England was great and difficult; the workers were few and overtaxed. That was why Wedderburn was driven to retire from Parliament to economize his resources for direct work on behalf of India. The times were critical. By hard, earnest work and united purpose the Congress might constitute itself a valued adviser to the Government of India and an influence

¹ R. P. Masani, *op. cit.*, pp. 416-17.

in England, tending to strengthen the Empire. On the other hand, if the necessary sacrifice and self-denial were not exercised, the work of years would be nullified and a danger would arise that the physical sufferings of the masses might lead to counsels of despair. 'Against such a conclusion,' declared the three stalwarts, 'we who have given our best years to the service of India, will, to the last, use our best effort in the interest alike of India and England.'

At this psychological moment, when the youth of the land needed very careful handling, Lord Curzon used unguarded language in his convocation address at Calcutta University and made an imputation which was taken to be a serious reflection on the character of the Indian people. While stressing the importance of the function of a university in moulding the character of the youths of the country, he observed: 'We have hardly learned how to light the lamp of the soul. . . . We have to save the rising generation from walking in false paths and to guide them into right ones.' It was not unusual for chancellors and vice-chancellors of universities to lay special emphasis on character; but owing to the prevailing tension the whole country rose to protest not only against that particular speech but against the general policy of the overbearing Viceroy's administration. Nations are swayed by sentiment as greatly as are individuals. The sentiments of the Indian people having been outraged, reason and justice were silenced in the wholesale condemnation of a viceroyalty distinguished, in its earlier years at least, for remarkable sympathy, sagacity and statesmanship. The lofty proconsul had antagonized even those who might be called the Tories of India, just as King James II had turned the squires and parsons of his day into rebels. Large and influential meetings were held in Calcutta, Madras, Lahore, Bombay, Allahabad and other cities, at which citizens who had never before taken any part in politics, who even disliked the agitation carried on by the Congress, stood with the political agitators on a common platform and repudiated vehemently the aspersions cast upon the character of the people by the representative of the King-Emperor in India.

The Father of Indian Nationalism, Dadabhai Naoroji,

shared his countrymen's feeling of resentment on this occasion. At the same time he rejoiced to find their national spirit thus stirred to its depths. Hitherto he had been crying in the wilderness with a mere handful of colleagues; now, however, the whole nation was up in arms against the principles and policy underlying the system of government. No such event had taken place before in the history of British India. The seeds Dadabhai had scattered were bearing fruit; a new India was rising into view, an India conscious of her rights and pulsating with fresh ideas of freedom. Reviewing the situation, Dadabhai declared that the future could not be a continuance of the past. The Curzon régime had brought popular unrest to the danger-point, and he asked his countrymen to demand an instantaneous change in the system of administration. There were only two alternatives before the people and the rulers: a peaceful reformation of the administration of the country, or explosion.¹

The division of the ancient historic province of Bengal into two separate provinces with separate capitals, further antagonized the population. The storm over the Indian Universities Act of 1904 and the resentment caused by the most tactless action of the official majority in the Legislative Council in opposing and throwing out the Primary Education Bill, brought forward by so judicious and helpful a colleague as G. K. Gokhale, provoked protest meetings, unruly processions of inflamed college students and bonfires of foreign goods.

While the country was in such ferment, the time for the 22nd session of the Congress was drawing near. It was an occasion for stocktaking. Had the country obtained, or was it on the way to obtaining, full right of self-expression and self-government? If not, did not the policy hitherto pursued stand condemned as a 'mendicant policy'? At its birth, the Congress had received the blessings of the alien rulers as the child of the British Government. The child's filial devotion was exemplary; but in its period of adolescence many things had happened to stir the youth to revolt. Extremism had grown apace and the monster of violence had raised its head. At the meetings of the Congress to celebrate its coming of age a

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 426-7.

definite split between the elders and the young rebels was apprehended. There had been conflict for some time over the question of the ideals and methods of work of the Congress. Young Indians demanded a vitalizing programme and a re-constitution of the political life of the country, but the old-world politicians carried on the Congress work in their own way. It was not a merely emotional conflict, nor was it a personal conflict for ascendancy: it was essentially an intellectual conflict, a conflict of ideology. Self-government under British paramountcy was the goal of the old school; the ideal of the new school was national autonomy, freedom from all foreign control. This antithesis between the viewpoints of the two sections reflected a revolutionary change in the minds of the people. It also marked a dangerous phase in the political education of the country and caused no little concern among official circles and the European community generally. For a long period the British and the Anglo-Indian press had affected supreme unconcern about the manifestations of political unrest but could not now ignore the striking change that had come over the country. The ranks of the national party had been reinforced by discontented youths of whose temper there was no doubt. The fulminations of the Congress, though provoking, had been in practice harmless. Despite twenty-one years of hard and apparently vain patriotic toil, its leaders and members as a class had adhered amazingly to its fundamental principles of loyalty and constitutional method and in its agitation there was no menace to British supremacy. But the young rebels were determined to give these methods a deadly blow. There was no desire as yet, except among a handful of revolutionaries, to appeal to force. There was, however, the weapon of boycott, to which the young enthusiasts thought they could safely resort—boycott of British goods and, if necessary, of the councils. They believed they could, without going beyond the law and the constitution, bring the authorities to their knees by refusing to associate with the Government and by withholding from it all voluntary and honorary service; and they defied anyone to say that their ideals were not legitimate or that their method was not constitutional.

This cleavage between the two sections of the Congress

marked the real beginning of the ferment known in history as Indian nationalism. Hitherto, both sections had worked in alliance and their co-operation for the political purpose of opposition had tended to conceal their fundamental differences of method and aim. Now these differences appeared on the surface. The fears of those who had seen the spectre of sedition during the infancy of the Congress seemed fully justified. The spectre was now actually stalking the land.

The question which agitated the two sections most in the year 1906 was : who should be the President of the Congress for that year? The elders were in danger of being swamped by the Bengal delegates, a large majority of whom favoured the selection of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who had suffered imprisonment in the fight for freedom.

What made Tilak, a Maharashtrian, the hero of the extremist section? The most erudite among the Sanskrit scholars of the day, he had distinguished himself early in his career for splendid pioneering educational activities in preparing the public for self-government. In helping to found the New English School at Poona and consecrating himself to it in the spirit of service and sacrifice characteristic of Poona's citizens, he made it possible for poor students to avail themselves of a high-school education. The Deccan Education Society and Fergusson College, Poona, were other testimonials to his public service. Not only did Tilak and his colleagues make Poona famous as the intellectual capital of the Province of Bombay, but they taught, by example, citizens of other provinces how to take the school, the college and the university to the doors of the people. Unfortunately Tilak hated and denounced the British as no Indian politician had ever done before him. He hated them not merely because they had overthrown the Peshwas, the Brahmin rulers of the Deccan, but also because he felt that the impact of Western education given in educational institutions, founded and directed by the British rulers, had shattered the citadel of Hindu orthodoxy. The ancient indigenous learning had been condemned and the new exalted to heaven, so that Hinduism had lost its authority. Sanskrit scholarship was despised and ridiculed and the whole system of social relationship,

customs, ritual and traditions, which a Hindu could claim as his own, had been undermined and the national faith in religious beliefs and traditions shattered.

Bent on eradicating such influence and demolishing British rule itself, Tilak started a movement based upon a revival of the memory of the Maratha hero Shivaji, who had two and a half centuries earlier freed the Deccan of Muslim control. Taking as his text the verse in the Bhagavad Gita which teaches that a shatriya, a member of the caste whose *dharma* (duty) is to fight, commits no crime if he slays his foe, the master of Marathi prose subtly presented to the readers of his paper, the *Kesari* (Lion), the spectacle of Shivaji, the national hero, horror-struck at what he saw when he returned to his native land after a long absence. Tilak's subtle suggestions fell on fertile soil. Poona, the ancient capital of the Peshwas, inaugurated a 'Society for the Removal of Obstacles to the Hindu Religion'. Shortly afterwards two Brahmin members of the Society murdered two British officers charged with the duty of taking certain measures for the eradication of the bubonic plague which had broken out in Bombay in 1896 and was then raging in Poona. Two informers were also assassinated. Tilak was tried and sent to jail. He emerged from prison with the crown of martyrdom on his head. Twelve years later he was again sent to jail for a similar offence, a veiled approval of the murder of two Englishwomen at Muzzaffarpur in Bengal.

The main difference between the extremists and the moderates, during the first decade of the twentieth century, turned on boycott as a political weapon to bring British rule in India to a standstill. In a speech before a Calcutta audience Tilak explained specifically what he had in mind: 'If you have not the power of active resistance, have you not the power of self-denial and self-abstinence in such a way as not to assist this foreign government to rule over you? This is boycott and this is what is meant when we say, boycott is a political weapon.'¹ The moderates were not enamoured of this essay in non-cooperation. They pleaded for co-operation with the Government

¹ Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *His Writings and Speeches* (3rd edn., 1922), p. 77.

so as to improve the political status of the country steadily and surely, though slowly. Gokhale asked Tilak: 'Do you think, my friend, we are so devoid of self-respect and so base as to be happy at our country being under foreign yoke?' 'I would have my country free today,' he added, 'if that be possible. But is it possible? Can we work on that basis? In politics you must consider what is practicable. We can in no way bind future generations. Who are we to bind them irrevocably? We are doing what we, in our time, consider best and practicable.' In later years Tilak appeared to have abandoned the philosophy of political boycott as the most effective sanction for home rule. But he was a doughty champion of *swadeshi*; the boycott of foreign goods, to bring about the disappearance not only of visible foreign goods but also of the ideas of Western philosophy and civilization.

In Bengal, the centre of worship of the blood-thirsty Kali, youths regarded the murder of European officials as a sacrifice acceptable to the goddess. If such offerings were made in every village, the people of India would, they believed, be inspired 'with a divine spirit', and 'a crown of independence' would fall into their hands. Hence the popularity of the cult of the bomb and an increase in the number of extremists in Bengal. As the 22nd session of the Congress was to be held in Calcutta, the Bengal extremists could materially influence the selection of the President. Who could be a greater favourite than the Poona protagonist of the cult? The moderates in Bengal, though in a minority, endeavoured to forestall the Tilakites by persuading Dadabhai Naoroji to accept the office. They confidently expected that even the most rabid extremist would not oppose one revered throughout the land as the Father of Indian Nationalism, whose word carried unequalled authority. With the ardour and optimism of youth, the Grand Old Man of India accepted the invitation. The Tilakites were outwitted and had to acquiesce in Dadabhai's election. For several years he had urged self-government as the only remedy for India's ills. Only the year previously, in his message from England on the eve of a Congress session, he had said: 'No palliatives of any kind whatever, no mere alteration or tinkering of the mechanical machi-

nery of administration can or will do any good at all.... Self-government is the only remedy for India's woes and wrongs.¹ If Dadabhai had gone so far in 1905 the extremists might well hope that he would go a step further in 1906.

The keynote of Dadabhai's address was *Swaraj*, home rule. He had demanded it often before at political meetings in England, but this was the first occasion he had made the demand from a Congress platform. The split between the moderates and the extremists was, for the time being, averted. But as time went by, relations became strained more and more. At the Surat session in 1907 there was a trial of strength between the two factions. Amid bitter invective and violent disorder such as flinging of shoes, one of which was pointedly directed at Pherozeshah Mehta, the Lion of Bombay, the moderate leader of the Congress, the elders succeeded in holding their own. At the 1908 session a new constitution was adopted reaffirming Congress policy in the following words: 'The objects of the Indian National Congress are the attainment by the people of India of a system of government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire and a participation by them in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members. These objects are to be achieved by constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and developing and organizing the intellectual, moral, economic and industrial resources of the country.'

Meanwhile, among the extremist section the cult of the bomb was spreading, and was gathering strength all over the country and beyond. A regular arsenal was discovered in a garden suburb of Calcutta. Armed gangs of young men were formed to obtain funds by force. Police officers and witnesses were murdered. Repeated attempts were made on the life of Andrew Fraser, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, and A. M. T. Jackson, the erudite Collector of Nasik, was shot while attending an Indian drama. Revolutionary societies of Indians formed in London and Paris sponsored the cult of violence. Sir Curzon

¹ R. P. Masani, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

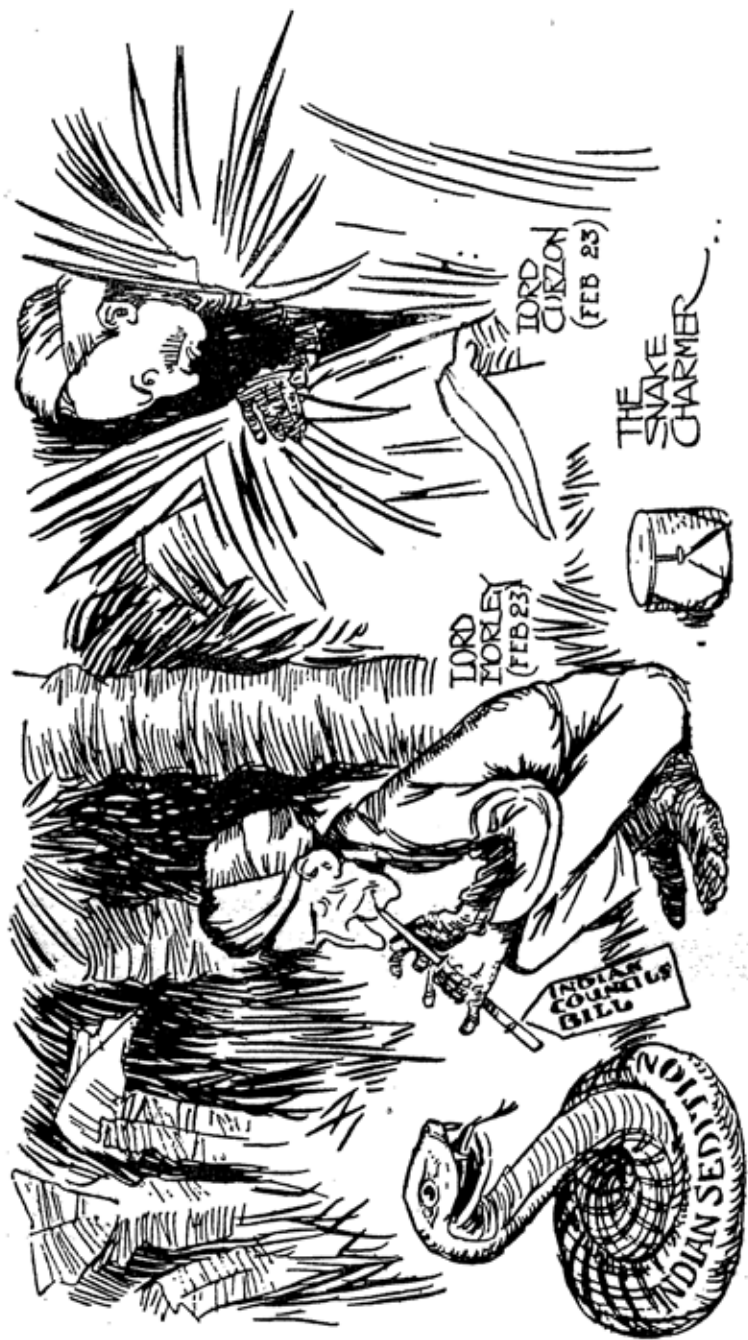
Wyllie, an eminent official at the India Office, was killed outside the Imperial Institute in London by a half-demented youth. The only policy that the Government of India could pursue in the face of such terrorism was repression. The moderates in the Congress feared that repression would lead to further acts of violence and they stressed the urgent need of conciliatory measures to quicken the pace of constitutional advance. The British Parliament of the day, with a big Liberal majority, appreciated the need. Fortunately there was a happy combination of two sagacious statesmen at the helm of affairs, John Morley at Whitehall as Secretary of State for India, and Lord Minto as Viceroy in India. Morley had been Gladstone's chief lieutenant in the campaign for home rule in Ireland. Minto, though a Conservative, was liberal at heart and determined to do all he could to help India. Both considered that while extremism and anarchism must be firmly checked, earnest efforts should be simultaneously made to satisfy the demand for further instalments of reform.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the assumption by the British Crown of the government of India, 1 November 1908, a message was received from the King-Emperor addressed to the princes and people of India, forecasting 'a greater share in legislation and government'. Shortly afterwards, a decision was taken to reconstitute the central and provincial councils, to enlarge them all, while retaining an official majority at the Centre, and to concede non-official majorities—of elected and nominated members taken together—in the provinces. It was further decided to authorize the councils to discuss and to pass resolutions on matters of public interest, including the Government's budget policy. The Indian Councils Act of 1909 was certainly an advance on that of 1892; but to create general or territorial constituencies of the British type was still regarded as being beyond the pale of practical politics. As a large number of seats were to be filled by election, the group system of representation was expanded. For the first time provision for separate communal elections was introduced into the constitution. While these strengthened the position of the Government, they also increased communal tension. The minorities were given

'weightage', that is, they obtained more seats than could have been allotted to them on a purely numerical basis.

The concession to Muslims, the reservation of seats for Muslim candidates to be elected by Muslim voters only, proved to be the root of all the trouble and travail which the country was to go through in the next forty years. The request for this highly mischievous concession was made to Lord Minto by a Muslim deputation headed by the Aga Khan. The quasi-electoral system of 1892 had introduced elections of a sort in the provinces and at the Centre. In practice this had revealed the weakness of the Muslim position. In a general or mixed electorate, the Congress-minded or compromising Muslim could secure non-Muslim votes. The Muslims wanted to make sure that their representatives were whole-heartedly Muslim, determined to stand up for their rights and their advancement. Hence their insistence on the demand that election to the seats reserved for their community should be made by Muslims alone. Against this the reply of the Viceroy and the historically-minded Secretary of State, so steeped in democratic traditions as Morley was, should have been what was subsequently stated in 1918 by Chelmsford and Montagu in their report on constitutional advance, namely that division by creeds and classes meant the creation of politicians' camps organized against each other and taught men to think as partisans and not as citizens. Instead, Lord Minto promptly conceded the Muslim demand, and honest John Morley, with some hesitation, endorsed it. The objective before them was to secure the acquiescence of an influential minority in the process of constitutional advance. Neither of them was thinking in terms of democracy or parliamentary practice.

The proposed changes were discussed fully in Parliament. It was urged by A. J. Balfour, the Conservative Leader of the Opposition, that representative institutions were only suitable where the population was in the main homogeneous and the minority prepared to accept the decisions of the majority. And Lord Curzon saw no place in the new constitution for the agriculturists who formed 80 per cent of the population but had neither vote nor voice. He was emphatically



Curzon's disapproval of Morley's Indian Councils Bill — (1909)

of opinion that as government in India grew more and more parliamentary it would become less personal and less beneficent to the poorer classes of the population. Morley retorted that they ought to have thought of that before they introduced occidental education. 'We applied that,' he said, 'and occidental government must follow.' However, he repudiated the suggestion that the proposed reforms implied introduction of the English parliamentary system in India, and added: 'If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily up to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it.'¹ He was as dogmatic on this point in private life as in public. 'Not one whit more than you,' he wrote to Minto, 'do I think it desirable or possible, or even conceivable, to adapt English political institutions to the nations who inhabit India.'² Who could have then thought that within a little more than a single generation both the semblance and the power would pass from the hands of the rulers to the people? Who could have then dreamt that the wars of 1914 and 1939 would make India one of the most important strategic areas in the world and that the principle of self-determination would gather such strength that immediately following the second war, Britain, though victorious in global conflict, would of her own accord decide to relinquish power earlier than the most optimistic of Indian politicians could have anticipated?

In actual working the limitations of the Act of 1909 were frequently found irksome. The members of the councils could pass resolutions and bring pressure on the provincial governments. Both at the Centre and in the provinces the executive yielded at times to retain the co-operation of the councils, but not always. They could be influenced, even coerced, but not controlled. The unrest continued. There was more terrorism in Bengal. Even the moderates could not get what they demanded, namely a non-official majority at the Centre and elected minorities in all the provinces.

In 1911, King George V and the Queen visited India to

¹ Morley: *Indian Speeches*, p. 91.

² *Recollections*, vol. II, p. 172.

attend a coronation durbar held in Delhi. Lord Hardinge, then Viceroy, was determined to bring Britain closer to India. Thanks to his thoughtful suggestions, a number of boons were announced at the durbar: a liberal grant for education, the release of prisoners, the transfer of the capital of India and with it the Central Government from Calcutta to Delhi, and a governor in council for Bengal.

Then came the war of 1914. Led by the wise Viceroy, India made a splendid contribution to the war effort. She sent more than a million men, including those who served in labour corps, to the battlefields. Several princes went on active service and distinguished themselves on various fronts. India subscribed £30,000,000 annually to the British Government besides handsome donations to the Red Cross and subscriptions to the war loans floated for the prosecution of the war. Indeed, never in the history of British occupation had India and Britain been drawn so close together as during those stirring days. This is not to say that on the political front within the country the Congress was less active than before. Its claims broadened in scope. In 1915, it declared that the time had come for the provincial councils to acquire an effective control over the acts of the executive. In the following year it called upon the Government to declare its intentions on the question of the transfer of power. In any post-war reconstruction India should, the Congress urged, be lifted from the status of a dependency to that of an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions.

Many things happened between 1916 and 1918. Wide as had been the gulf between Hindus and Muslims in the year 1914, it was bridged in 1916, for at the end of that year the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League met at Lucknow and came to an agreement regarding the method of election to the councils and the distribution of the seats. A joint scheme of constitutional advance was adopted, known thereafter as 'the Lucknow Pact'. In so far as separate Muslim electorates were conceded, the pact was a surrender to the Muslim League. All that the Muslims yielded in return was the abandonment of their right to vote in general as well as in special electorates.

On the other hand, the joint constitutional scheme brought the Muslim League into the Congress camp. Before the war the League had repudiated the Congress objective of colonial self-government; but one of the main features of the new scheme was that India should have Dominion status and that the relations of the Secretary of State with the Government of India should be similar to those of the Colonial Secretary with the governments of the Dominions. Jinnah, then President of the League, hailed it as heralding the birth of 'a new India fast growing to unity of thought, purpose, and outlook, responsive to new appeals of territorial patriotism and nationality'.¹ As an out-and-out nationalist of the day, he threw himself heart and soul into the activities of the Home Rule League, an organization about the origin of which some details are given in the following chapter.

While in India such unforeseen changes were taking place in the opinions, attitudes and alignments of the political parties and leaders, public opinion in Britain concerning the Indian problem was also undergoing a radical transformation. In 1912, even the Liberal Secretary of State for India, Lord Crewe, had disavowed the idea of Dominion status as the goal in India; but within five years the British Government, due partly to the growth of Indian nationalism and partly, probably mainly, to the vicissitudes of the war, looked at the Indian problem from what was called a new angle of vision and committed itself to a policy intended to carry India over the first difficult period of transition from autocracy to democracy and to lead her to the goal of responsible government within the British Empire.

The war was fought by the Allies to protect their democratic institutions. National self-determination was their watchword. How could Britain, the traditional champion of freedom, deny freedom to India? Lloyd George's National Government was at the helm of affairs and Edwin Montagu had succeeded Lord Crewe at the India Office. Montagu had staked his career on the question of doing justice to India, and the National Government, although including eminent Conservatives such as Milner, Curzon and Balfour, encouraged him to go forward. The result

¹ Sir Verney Lovett : *A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement*, p. 121.

was the historic announcement of August 1917. Its opening sentence thrilled all sections of the Indian people: 'The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.' In fact what had been considered impossible and unthinkable on every previous occasion was now deemed desirable and feasible. The expression 'responsible government' meant that the executive in India would be responsible to the legislature and thus to the electorate. The 'progressive' realization of responsible government meant that India as a nation could reach the goal within a reasonable time. No wonder that Indians extended to Montagu their warmest welcome when he toured India in the cold weather of 1917-18 during consultations with the central and provincial governments, leaders of political thought and men eminent in other fields of public life.

The Government of India Act embodying these proposals was laid before Parliament in the following year. A beginning was to be made in the provinces; the legislative councils were to be enlarged and were to be elected on an extended franchise. The fundamental aim was the introduction of responsible government by instalments. Under the dyarchic scheme, certain portfolios such as Education, Local Self-government, Public Health and Excise were to be handed over to ministers responsible to the legislatures; the rest, including Law and Order, Land Revenue and Famine Relief, were to be reserved to the Governor in Council. It was hoped that as time went on and the legislatures gained experience and learnt to discharge their duties efficiently, further powers would be entrusted to them, until full provincial autonomy was attained. Provincial governors were given emergency powers only to be exercised in the event of a breakdown of the administration. At the Centre, the Executive Council of the Governor-General, consisting of seven members, some of them non-official Indians, remained responsible to the British Parliament through the Secretary of

State for India; but a bicameral legislature was established. It consisted of a Legislative Assembly of 140 members, of whom 105 were elected, and a Council of State or Senate of 60 members, of whom 34 were elected.

A significant paragraph in the Instrument of Instructions to the Governor-General suggested that India's natural goal was indeed Dominion status. The enactment applied to British India only, as Parliament had no authority to legislate for the princely states which were left to adjust their governments in their own way. Some day, it was hoped, union of some kind between British and Indian India might be achieved. In the meantime, as a means of breaking down the isolation of the states from one another and from British India, a Chamber of Princes was to be established at the Centre with a view to affording the rulers an opportunity of conferring together on matters of common interest.

The Act of 1919 thus brushed aside all obstacles barring the road to parliamentary government. It was an act of faith, that the illiterate masses forming 80 to 90 per cent of the total population would gradually learn to wisely exercise the privilege of the vote. Faith also in the people's devotion to their motherland and in their sense of patriotism to overcome caste and communal antipathies. Faith, moreover, that membership of a wider commonwealth would promote a feeling of unity with the British Empire as a whole. Although it had been never specifically stated, hopes ran high in political circles that through the channel of dyarchy the bark of India's constitution would be guided to the haven of Dominion status. Unfortunately, even before the new Act could be brought into operation, storm clouds gathered over the horizon and the bark was seen to be drifting towards the shoals of anarchy.

The full growth of Indian nationhood and the progressive realization of responsible government depended on the co-operation of the main, if not all, forces of Indian nationalism. The historic announcement of 1917 had made it quite clear that the time and pace of each advance would be determined by the use which India's politicians made of their new opportunities. The new policy was to be on trial for ten years and

it was provided that at the end of that period a commission should be appointed to see how the new constitution had worked and to advise Parliament whether its scope should be extended or restricted. But the introduction of this initial measure of responsible government synchronized with a period of world-wide unrest which in India caused extraordinary ferment. Political power was no longer in the hands of the older generation with their genuine admiration for and abiding faith in constitutional methods. The co-operation on which the extension of the new policy depended was not forthcoming. A new leader was coming to the fore, determined to supplant the Congress policy of constitutionalism and co-operation with non-co-operation and civil disobedience which, although non-violent, were no less powerful than physical force. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, destined to occupy the centre of the Indian political stage for thirty years, had already made a name as the victorious general in the passive resistance campaign in South Africa. Not that he was a revolutionary by instinct: destiny had made him one by creating situations in which evolutionary methods seemed futile, and obedience to law revolted against his conscience.

A brief account of the South African campaign will serve as an introduction to the indomitable personality whose crusade was waged not against any individual or individuals but against the forces of colonialism and capitalism fostered by occidental civilization. For in India, ever since Macaulay's famous minute decided the course of education of the people, there had been conflict between Western and Eastern culture, and this became more pronounced with the emergence of Gandhi as the personification of the moral and spiritual principles of ancient Indian civilization. Gandhi denounced as satanic not only British rule but the whole of Western civilization in all its manifestations, scientific invention and the mechanical appliances of industry included. The spinning-wheel for the weaving of homespun cloth, *khaddar*, and the exclusion of imported textiles, was to be the first step and symbol of his campaign. The story of the South African campaign demonstrates the stuff of which Gandhi was made, the mental vigour and spiritual fer-

vour of this simple, pious and peaceful man who, although at peace with himself and with his fellow men, found himself in opposition to the prevailing social and political order and felt impelled to forge his way towards the goal of the ideal order of his dream. It further shows how friendly he was to the British people, how co-operative and helpful, how he looked forward to an era of friendly union and partnership with Britain, and what a grievous tragedy it was that a man so loyal to the British Crown as to have co-operated in the war effort despite his allegiance to the doctrine of *ahimsa* (non-violence) should have been driven to inveterate, although chivalrous, opposition to British rule.

A Hero's Home-coming

BORN in 1869, in the State of Porbander in India, Gandhi arranged to go to England in 1888 to qualify himself as a lawyer. For a lad of his caste a sea voyage was a defiance of religious injunction. Although his mother was very unhappy at the prospect, he succeeded in getting her consent. Before, however, he could embark on his voyage, he was summoned to a meeting of people of his caste and was told that, in the opinion of the assembly, it would be improper for him to go to England. 'I cannot alter my resolve to go to England,' said the youth firmly, whereupon the caste's verdict was : 'This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee and four annas.'¹

Unperturbed, the excommunicate sailed from Bombay on 4 September 1888, and returned duly qualified as a barrister in July 1891. After two years of precarious practice, he received an invitation from Messrs Dada Abdulla & Company to proceed to Durban to instruct their counsel in a lawsuit, a complicated case concerning a claim of £40,000. Gandhi's services were secured for one year. Of the colour prejudice which was pronounced in that part of the world Gandhi had a foretaste within a week of his arrival at Durban. On his way to Pretoria, where his presence was required in connexion with the suit, he was ordered by a railway servant to shift to a van compartment, although he held a first-class ticket. He refused to budge an inch but was forcibly pushed out by a European constable. The train steamed away, leaving the 'coolie barrister' to shiver all night in a dark waiting room. His first impulse was to quit what appeared to him to be a God-forsaken country, but how

¹ D. G. Tendulkar : *Mahatma*, vol. I, p. 33.

could he leave his clients in the lurch? Late that night he came to the conclusion that it would be a cowardly act to run away, and decided to stay on and face courageously whatever might be in store for him. Disregarding further insults, he reached Pretoria. Seeing that the suit, if persisted in, would drag on for a very long time and ruin both plaintiff and defendant, he persuaded them to accept arbitration.

Just as Gandhi was preparing to return to India, early in 1894, he found that the Government of Natal was about to introduce a Bill to disfranchise Indians. He advised the Indian population to resist strongly such an encroachment on their rights, and drew up a petition to the Legislative Council. 'Stay and help us,' they prayed. In response to this prayer he founded the Natal Indian Congress to agitate in South Africa and in England against the iniquities of the authorities. Weekly letters were written to Dadabhai, as a member, and to Wedderburn, as Chairman, of the British Committee of the Indian National Congress.

Gandhi agreed to stay for one month, but the crusade continued for more than a decade during which he founded the Passive Resistance Association, taught and led people to resist unjust laws, organized workers' strikes, went to jail four times, chivalrously suspended the struggle during the days of the Boer War, assisted in the war effort, raised an Indian Ambulance Corps and another Corps during the Zulu rebellion, and fought a plague epidemic in Johannesburg. The reward for their voluntary war services under Gandhi's leadership came to the Indian community in the shape of an ordinance (August 1906), requiring every Indian, man, woman and child, entitled to reside in the Transvaal to have his name registered and to take out a certificate of registration. The Registrar of Asiatics was required to note down important marks of identification found upon the applicant's person, and to take his finger and thumb impressions. Failure to apply for registration was an offence punishable with fine, imprisonment or deportation, within the discretion of the courts.

A first-class crisis had arisen. All constitutional means of protest, representations and deputations having failed, the

Indian population decided, under the leadership of their adroit general, to offer passive resistance. 'If anyone came forward to demand a certificate from my wife,' said one of the prominent members of the Indian community at a protest meeting, 'I would shoot him on the spot and take the consequences.' But violence was ruled out. Gandhi said that he had studied all anti-Asiatic Acts but had never come across anything like this ordinance. 'I feel,' he added, 'we have done the right thing. . . . In all our actions, in this respect, we are full of loyalty. I know my countrymen; I know I can trust them and I know also that when occasion requires a heroic step to be taken, every man amongst us would take it. There is only one course open to me, namely, to die, but not to submit to the law, even if everyone else were to hold back, leaving me alone. I am confident that I should never violate my pledge.'¹

The Asiatic Regulation Act, an exact replica of the original ordinance, was rushed through all its stages at a single sitting of the Transvaal Parliament on 21 March 1907. Imagining that Pretoria was the weakest spot in the organization of the Indian population, the authorities opened a permit office there and notified the Indian inhabitants to register themselves within one month. 'Anything like compulsion is contrary to the spirit of our struggle,' said Gandhi. Pretoria was placarded with posters incorporating slogans such as 'Boycott the permit office', 'By going to gaol we do not resist but suffer for our common good and self-respect', 'Loyalty to the King demands loyalty to the King of Kings—Indians be free!' The boycott was successful, only about 100 persons out of a population of 1,500 having registered themselves. Thus opened the historic satyagraha campaign. General Smuts declared: 'If resistance of Indians leads to unpleasant results, they will have only themselves and their leaders to blame. . . . The Government have made up their minds to make this a white man's country.'

On 11 November 1913, Gandhi was prosecuted for inciting workers' strikes. His counsel stated that he had been asked by the defendant not to plead in mitigation in any way whatsoever. He was expressing the desire of the defendant when he stated

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 95 ff.

that the magistrate had a duty to perform and that he should not, therefore, hesitate to inflict the highest punishment on the defendant if he felt that the circumstances of the case justified it. The magistrate sentenced Gandhi to a fine of £60 or nine months' rigorous imprisonment. 'I elect to go to jail,' said Gandhi. His message to the strikers was: 'No cessation of the strike without repeal of the tax¹. The Government, having imprisoned me, can gracefully make a declaration regarding the repeal.'² His incarceration provoked a general strike. Mounted police chased the strikers, but they would not be cowed. At Gandhi's second trial, on 14 November, his colleagues, Hermann Kallenbach and H. S. L. Polak, were also brought before the court. The police found it difficult to find witnesses. Gandhi therefore produced witnesses against himself and the charge against him was proved. But who would testify against Kallenbach and Polak? As they did not wish to protract the case for want of evidence, Gandhi went to the aid of the police and provided the evidence against his gallant colleagues. Each was sentenced to three months' imprisonment. The authorities separated Gandhi from his friends and took him to Bloemfontein where none could approach him and where he was the only Indian prisoner.

All the while India was backing Gandhi and the other passive resisters. The good and great Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, exerted his full influence in their favour, and voiced the unanimous sentiments of India and the sympathy 'deep and burning' not only of India but of all lovers of India like himself 'for their compatriots in South Africa in their resistance to invidious and unjust laws'. Neither was the British press wanting in sympathy. *The Times* declared that the march of the Indian labourers must live in memory as one of the most remarkable manifestations in the history of the spirit of passive resistance. The Secretary of State for India and the colonial authorities also exerted their full influence on the South African Government. The orderly, non-violent and chivalrous manner in which

¹ i.e., the £3 fee for obtaining a certificate under the Immigration Registration Act.

² D. G. Tendulkar, op. cit., p. 175.

the struggle had been conducted by the disciplined soldiers of the satyagraha army won the admiration of the nations of the world, including the people of South Africa and not excluding the officials whose unpleasant duty it had been to take repressive measures. The combined effect of all these factors was to make the Union Government climb down slowly by appointing a commission to inquire into the causes of the strike. The commission recommended Gandhi's release, which took place accordingly on 18 December.

Gandhi was pained by the shooting of innocent labourers during the strike. He imposed on himself a triple vow of self-suffering: to cover his body with a loincloth and *kurta* only, to walk barefoot, and to have only one meal each day. At a meeting held under the auspices of the Natal Indian Association he declared that if the labourers' just grievances were not removed, all of them should be 'ready to suffer battle again, to suffer imprisonment and march out'. Soon afterwards there was a big strike of the European employees of the Union railways, and Gandhi decided not to take advantage of the Government's difficulties by marching the Indian satyagrahis through the streets. This chivalrous decision created a favourable impression, and Smuts was himself touched by the self-imposed gesture of consideration and courtesy. Thus every incident in this historic episode brought out conspicuously, one by one, the splendid traits of character of the hero who was determined to do what he believed to be right, regardless of suffering, and whose success in confronting iniquity and brutality depended so much on the simplicity and power of his own personality.

On 21 January 1914 a provisional agreement was arrived at between Smuts and Gandhi and the satyagraha suspended. The imprisoned satyagrahis were released gradually. Years later, on the occasion of Gandhi's seventy-eighth birthday, Smuts was to say: 'It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect. His activities at that time were very trying to me. For him everything went according to plan. For me, the defender of law and order, there was the usual trying situation, the odium of carrying out a law which

had no strong public support and finally the discomfiture when the law had to be repealed. For him it was a successful *coup*. Nor was the personal touch wanting. In jail he had prepared for me a pair of sandals which he presented to me when he was set free. I have worn these sandals for many a summer since then, even though I may feel that I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man.¹

The hero's mission in South Africa was over. He decided to return to India. Farewell gatherings, banquets and addresses marked the esteem in which he was held by the entire population, including the European residents and the South African press. In acknowledging the tributes he referred movingly to the help given by Europeans resident in South Africa, and himself disclaimed credit for the successful termination of the struggle. 'If I merit any approbation,' he said, 'how much more do those behind, who went into the battle with simple faith, with no thought of appreciation!'²

On 18 July 1914, accompanied by his wife, Kasturba, and Kallenbach, Gandhi sailed for England, a third-class passenger. At Madeira he heard of the impending conflagration, which broke out two days before he reached London. A deputation of the Congress consisting of Bhupendranath Basu, Jinnah, Lala Lajpat Rai and others was in London in connexion with the proposed reform of the Secretary of State's Council. In a message to the King they said: 'We have not the slightest doubt that, as on previous occasions when the British forces were engaged in defending the interests of the Empire, so on the present occasion, the princes and people of India will readily and willingly co-operate to the best of their ability.' Simultaneously, Dadabhai Naoroji, radiant in retirement at Versova, near Bombay, issued a message to the people of India, breathing the same spirit of loyalty and co-operation: 'The war in Europe. What is our—India's—place in it? . . . We are, above all, British citizens of the Great British Empire. . . . Fighting as the British people are at present in a righteous cause for the good and glory of human dignity and civilization, and moreover, being the beneficent instrument of our own progress and

¹ *ibid.*, p. 184.

² *ibid.*

civilization, our duty is clear to do our — everyone's — best to support the British fight with our life and property.' A wave of loyalty spread over the whole country, and the events which followed marked one of the brightest episodes in the history of Indo-British relations. In England, Gandhi urged at a meeting of Indian students that England's difficulty should not be turned into India's opportunity. At a reception in his honour at the Cecil Hotel, London, held on 8 August by Indian and British admirers, Gandhi also took the opportunity of advising his Indian friends to 'think imperially in the best sense of the word and do their duty'.

Together with eighty Indian volunteers, including Kasturba and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, Gandhi took a six-weeks' course in first aid. Then he fell victim to an attack of pleurisy. Lord Roberts advised him to get back to India. 'It is only there,' he said, 'that you can be completely cured. If after your recovery, you should find the war still going on, you will have many opportunities there of rendering help. As it is, I do not regard what you have already done as by any means a mean contribution'. Gandhi accepted the advice; with ribs bandaged in adhesive plaster, he sailed with Kasturba for India on 19 December. At a farewell reception at the Westminster Palace Hotel, he said: 'I have been practically an exile for twenty-five years, and my friend and master, Mr Gokhale, has warned me not to speak on Indian questions as India is a foreign land to me. But the India of my imagination is an India unrivalled in the world, an India where the most spiritual treasures are to be found. And it is my dream and hope that the connexion between India and England might be a source of spiritual comfort and uplifting to the whole world at large.'

Welcomed at Bombay by a deputation of influential citizens on 9 January 1915, Gandhi told the representatives of the press that, as Gokhale had very properly pointed out to him, he had been out of India so long that he had no business to form any definite conclusion about matters essentially Indian and that he should pass some time as an observer and a student. To gain first-hand knowledge of the country's condition he travelled far and wide, and settled down on 15 May in an ashram founded

at Ahmedabad and named by him, 'Satyagraha Ashram'. 'Our creed,' he said, 'is devotion to truth; our business is the search for and insistence on truth.'¹ In order to serve the people effectively, it was considered essential for every inmate of the ashram to take and observe several vows, of truth, *ahimsa* (non-violence), celibacy, non-stealing, non-possession, and of control of the palate. Attention was concentrated on the production of *khadi*: 'I swear by this form of swadeshi because through it I can provide work to the semi-starved, semi-employed women of India. My idea is to get these women to spin yarn, and to clothe the people of India with khadi woven out of it. I do not know how far this movement is going to succeed. At present it is only beginning. But I have full faith in it.'² The King's birthday honours list, published on 3 June, included Gandhi's name as one of the recipients of the Kaiser-i-Hind medal for his services to the British Empire. Adhering to the pledge given to Gokhale, he made no political speech during the year and confined his activities to social reform.

At midnight on 17 June 1915, after six years' exile, Tilak was brought secretly from Mandalay and liberated in front of his residence in Poona. He, like Gandhi, was for some time inactive in the political field, but Annie Besant, who had recently turned from metaphysics to politics, was extraordinarily active, endeavouring to launch a countrywide movement for home rule for India. In September it was announced in her organ, *Commonweal*, that it had been decided to establish a Home Rule League, an auxiliary to the National Congress in India and its British Committee in England. Its general aim was to educate the people and to provide the Congress demand for self-government with the support and strength of a nation united in knowledge of itself and its single aim. Then followed the announcement that Dadabhai Naoroji, who in retirement was a moral and spiritual force, detached from the turmoil of politics, had consented to be President of the League. Most Congressmen considered it outrageous that another organization should be brought into being to pursue the very object forming the principal plank in the Congress programme, namely, self-

¹ *ibid.*, p. 207.

² *ibid.*, p. 215.

government. They suspected that the extremists would use the new movement to wreck the Congress, and few were enamoured of the methods of the gifted but volatile lady who, it was understood, would be at the helm of the League's affairs. 'What about your Presidentship of the Home Rule League?' asked Dinsha Wacha, the veteran General Secretary to the Congress in a letter addressed to Dadabhai. 'We do not approve of the methods of Mrs Besant who late in the day has come forward to support the Congress movement. . . . We are alarmed that the way in which she is going about on her own responsibility, supported from behind by the extremists, is a distinct menace to the peaceful progress of our country.'¹

The doyen of Indian politics, however, saw no reason why Mrs Besant should be discouraged from going forward merely because some friends suspected that the promoters of the League would work in a manner prejudicial to the Congress. She had assured him that she would do nothing to injure the Congress cause, and all that was necessary, he said, was to keep her to her word. Wedderburn, however, thought otherwise. As Chairman of the British Committee of the Congress he declined to be also the local head of the League. Moreover, he was not in favour of further agitation while both England and India were in the thick of war. Having failed to secure the goodwill of the Congress, Mrs Besant decided to go slow. The League was not constituted until 1917, by which time Dadabhai's days of political activity were over. Mrs Besant secured for the League the support of three powerful leaders, Lajpat Rai, Tilak and Jinnah, but the moderates feared that Tilak, if not she herself, would capture the Congress and demand home rule for India forthwith, for which they thought the time had not arrived. Pherozeshah Mehta, for example, had always stood against the admission of Tilak with his firebrands into the Congress camp.

The Congress met in Bombay in December 1915. It had lost during the year three distinguished leaders—Gokhale, Mehta and Henry Cotton. S. P. Sinha, who presided at the meeting, described India as a patient whose fractured limbs were in

¹ R. P. Masani, *op. cit.*, p. 531.

splints. He doubted whether the boon of full self-government was worth having, even if the English nation were willing to make an immediate free gift of it. The Congress, however, adopted a resolution affirming that the time had come to introduce full measures of reform towards the attainment of self-government. Gandhi remained in the background, but after a year's self-imposed silence he regarded himself free to criticize the Government, just as he was exposing the shortcomings of the people.

The Doctrine of Non-Violence

FREE though he now was to plunge into politics, Gandhi was in no hurry to set the Thames on fire as he had no idea how to proceed nor what should be his first move. It was not long, however, before he got an opportunity to give the Government and the public a foretaste of what was to follow. In February 1916, he was invited to a gathering on the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone of the Benares Hindu University and to speak on the occasion. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, on whose life several attempts had been made by anarchists, was present and special precautions had been taken by the police for his protection. The Maharaja of Darbhanga presided, and several princes were sitting around him on the dais.

'It is a matter of deep humiliation and shame for us,' said Gandhi at the outset, 'that I am compelled this evening to address my countrymen in a language that is foreign to me. . . . I am hoping that this university will see to it that the youths who come to it will receive their instruction through the medium of their vernaculars. Our language is the reflection of ourselves, and if you tell me that our languages are too poor to express the best thought, then say that the sooner we are wiped out of existence the better for us. Is there a man who dreams that English can ever become the national language of India? Why this handicap on the nation?'¹

Coming to the demand for home rule, he observed: 'No paper contribution will ever give us self-government. No amount of speeches will ever make us fit for self-government. It is only our conduct that will fit us for it. . . . Before we think of self-government, we shall have to do the necessary

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 220 ff.

plodding.' Then he turned to another theme. The Maharaja had spoken about the poverty of India, and others had laid great stress upon it. What, however, did he witness in the great pandal in which the foundation ceremony was performed by the Viceroy? Certainly a most gorgeous show, an exhibition of jewellery enough to make a splendid feast for the eye of any Parisian jeweller. 'I compare with the richly bedecked noblemen the millions of the poor,' Gandhi said, 'and I feel like saying to these noblemen, "there is no salvation for India unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and hold it in trust for your countrymen in India".'

Seeing detectives stationed everywhere, Gandhi asked : 'Why this distrust? . . . Why was it necessary to impose these detectives on us? . . . Let us not forget that India of today in her impatience has produced an army of anarchists. I myself am an anarchist, but of another type. . . . I honour the anarchist for his love of the country. I honour him for his bravery and will to die for his country; but I ask him, is killing honourable? . . . If I found it necessary for the salvation of India that the English should retire, that they should be driven out, I would not hesitate to declare that they would have to go, and I hope I would be prepared to die in defence of that belief.'

When he came to the question of partition of Bengal and said that he had been told that, unless people had thrown bombs, they would not have gained what they had in the reversal of the decision for the partition of the province, Mrs Besant, who had by this time lost patience, considered it necessary to intervene and to exclaim : 'Please stop it !' Unperturbed, Gandhi continued : 'This is what I said in Bengal. . . . I think what I am saying is necessary. If I am told to stop, I shall obey.' Turning to the Maharaja, he then said : 'I await your orders. If you consider that by my speaking as I am, I am not serving the country and the empire, I shall certainly stop.' The audience shouted, 'Go on.' The Maharaja replied, 'Please explain your object.' Continuing his speech, Gandhi said : 'I want to purge India of this atmosphere of suspicion on either side. If we are to reach our goal, we should have an empire which is to be based upon mutual love and mutual trust. . . .

Let us frankly and openly say whatever we want to say to our rulers, and face the consequences if what we have to say does not please them. But let us not abuse.'

While he was thus speaking, Mrs Besant left the meeting, followed by several princes. Then the president, the Maharaja, left. Gandhi thereupon ended his speech abruptly, and late that night the police commissioner issued an order for his externment from Benares.

Gandhi left the city next morning. The newspaper reports of his first plunge into politics created a great stir. To one young man from Maharashtra, who was then studying Sanskrit in the holy city, Gandhi's words of reproof and admonition came as early monsoon showers on a parched land. There was no need now for him to go to the Himalayas for *shanti* (peace), as he had been contemplating, for here was a God-given guide who combined in his teaching *kranti* (revolution) as well as *shanti* (peace). Anxious for intellectual and spiritual light, he wrote at once to Gandhi asking for acceptance as his disciple. This youth, who became Gandhi's trusted pupil and coadjutor, was Vinoba Bhawe, who now devotes his whole time, talent and energy to the evolution of the social order of his master's dream.

After Benares, Gandhi visited Poona, Hardwar, Karachi and Madras. Wherever possible, he addressed his audience in Hindi and preached *swadeshi* (the use of indigenous products, implements and institutions). *Swadeshi*, as he defined it, was 'a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical discomfort which it may cause to individuals'. It was 'the only doctrine consistent with the laws of humility and love'.

Gandhi was neither a moderate nor an extremist in the orthodox sense of these terms. Whenever possible, he attended political conferences and distinguished himself in his advocacy of social and economic as well as political reforms. Having studied the economic and social situation in India for two years, he returned to his agitation against the exploitation of Indian labour under the indenture system in the colonies. Resolutions were moved in the Imperial Legislative Council;

meetings were held in Karachi, Calcutta and other cities. A deputation of women was sent to the Viceroy. At last, in April 1917, the emigration of indentured labour was stopped.

There was also an obnoxious system of labour prevailing on the plantations nearer home. Thousands of agriculturists and their labourers growing indigo had to work under appalling conditions. At the 1916 Lucknow session of the Congress, Gandhi came to know something about it. An agriculturist from Bihar persuaded him to move a resolution from the Congress platform 'to wash away the stain of indigo'. The careful man, Gandhi, whose rule of life it was to speak the truth and take his stand on the rock of truth before launching any campaign for the redress of any wrong, said that he could do nothing before seeing the conditions for himself. After prolonged inquiry, he submitted an exhaustive report to the Government. It ended on a conciliatory note: 'I have no desire to hurt the planters' feelings. I have received every courtesy from them. Believing as I do that ryots are labouring under grievous wrongs from which they ought to be freed immediately, I have dealt, as calmly as is possible for me to do so, with the system which the planters are working. I have entered upon my mission in the hope that they as Englishmen, born to enjoy the fullest personal liberty and freedom, will not be grudging the ryots . . . the same measure of liberty and freedom.'

The Bihar Government then called for reports from the district officers, the settlement officers and the planters, and Gandhi was interviewed by the Lieutenant-Governor for three successive days. The result of these discussions was as satisfactory and as creditable to both sides as it could be. It was decided that an inquiry committee should be appointed with Gandhi as one of its members. The committee submitted a unanimous report. All its recommendations were accepted, and resulted in an agrarian Act.

Meanwhile Tilak and Mrs Besant were vigorously preaching home rule from city to city. Tilak's message was a simple one: 'Be prepared to say that you are a Home Ruler. Say that you must have Home Rule and, I dare say, when you are ready, you will get it . . . within a year or two.' In March 1917, the Central

Government issued a circular regarding the policy to be pursued in dealing with the home rule agitation. Students were prohibited from attending meetings where home rule was likely to be discussed. In Madras, Lord Pentland, the Governor, served an order of internment on Mrs Besant, who was the life and soul of the movement, and on her co-workers. Nothing could have helped the movement more than this attempt to gag it. Home Rule became the slogan of every budding politician. A joint meeting of the All-India Congress Committee and the Council of the Muslim League was convened on 28 July. A small deputation consisting of Jinnah, Srinivasa Sastri, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Wazir Hassan was appointed to proceed to England to explain and promote the scheme of reform adopted at Lucknow. It asked for an authoritative pronouncement 'pledging the Imperial Government in unequivocal terms to the policy of making India a self-governing member of the British Empire'.¹

The vicissitudes of war, world events and the splendid war effort of the Indian people, irrespective of the agitation for an immediate instalment of reform, had their combined effect on the rulers. In the course of a parliamentary debate, Edwin Montagu stigmatized the Government of India as being 'far too wooden, far too iron, far too inelastic and far too antediluvian to subserve its purposes in modern times'. He might well have directed the shafts of his criticism against the British Government and Parliament in whom the ultimate authority was vested by statute, and might have with equal force and justification railed against the real trustees in whom the Government of India was vested. For since its transfer from the East India Company to the Crown the interest taken by the British Parliament in Indian administration had waned, and its influence and control had deteriorated. Before 1858, the question of renewing the Company's charter was periodically reviewed by select committees set up by Parliament. These investigating committees recorded evidence which brought to light not a few abuses which had to be remedied. Thus every renewal led to reforms and increased parliamentary control. The transfer of adminis-

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

tration to the Crown put an end to the Company's rule and with it disappeared the distinct and direct responsibility of Parliament to review the situation each twenty years. The Secretary of State for India and his Council were the authorities under whom the Government of India functioned; and as their salaries were not included in the parliamentary supply estimates, the responsibility of Parliament was whittled down. In this way, the duties of the British public as trustees for a vast and distant country with millions of people living in a state of semi-starvation, came to be altogether neglected. The grinding poverty of the Indian people had never featured in the election manifestos of the party leaders nor in their speeches in the House of Commons.

Shortly after his assumption of office as Secretary of State, Montagu found himself in a position to make the epoch-making pronouncement mentioned in a previous chapter, declaring responsible government in India as the goal of British policy. In pursuance of this policy, Mrs Besant and her associates were released. Tilak remained firm in his demand for home rule as embodied in the Congress-League scheme. He had an interview with Montagu, who had arrived in India on a visit, but Montagu's efforts to secure his support for the reforms proved unavailing. Gandhi, who had had no hand in the formulation of the Congress-League scheme, was as resolute an advocate thereof as Tilak, and secured thousands of signatures for a petition to be presented to Montagu. His transparent sincerity and honesty were conspicuous in his insistence that signatures should be taken only after full and careful explanation of the significance and scope of the scheme.

A meeting of the Gujerat Political Conference was held at Godhra in November, with Gandhi in the chair. In a stirring speech in Marathi, Tilak wanted to know what the bureaucracy had done in the last hundred years to train the people industrially and otherwise to be self-reliant. Paying a tribute to Dadabhai Naoroji for his indictment of British rule as 'un-British' and for his great pioneering work for the political progress of the country, he observed that the people of India were demanding self-government not only for their own benefit

but also for the sake of the Empire. Repudiating the imputation that in clamouring for self-government India was taking advantage of Britain's troubles in the world crisis, he pointed out that the Congress had been agitating for self-government ever since the year 1906, when as President of the Calcutta Congress, Dadabhai had asked for it from the Congress platform. Mrs Besant was no less emphatic. 'The war that has entered on its fourth year,' said she, 'has for its true object the destruction of autocracy and the establishment of the God-given right to self-rule and self-development of every nation. Autocracy and bureaucracy must perish utterly in East and West.'

While Gandhi was engaged in social welfare work in Bihar, a famine threatened the Kaira district of Bombay Presidency following a failure of crops. Under the land revenue rules then in force, if the crops fetched four annas in the rupee or less the cultivators could claim suspension of the assessment for the year. According to the official estimates for the year, there was no case for relief. Gandhi visited over fifty villages and after a searching inquiry came to the conclusion that the demand of the villagers for relief was justified. He suggested the appointment of an impartial investigation committee. The authorities turned down the proposal and threatened to take coercive measures for the collection of revenue. Gandhi advised the ryots to resort to satyagraha. The commissioner of the district blamed him for creating trouble at a critical moment in the war. Gandhi replied that it was the commissioner himself who had invited a crisis. 'I venture to suggest,' he said, 'that the commissioner's attitude constitutes a peril far greater than the German peril, and I am serving the Empire in trying to deliver it from this peril from within.'

As the peasants' firmness showed no signs of wavering, the officials sold their cattle and seized whatever they could lay their hands on. Standing crops were attached. After four months, however, the dispute came to an unexpected end. The mamlatdar (the chief revenue officer) of Nadiad in Kaira district, informed Gandhi that if the well-to-do cultivators met their liability, the poorer ones would be granted suspension. Orders declaring suspension were already issued. At a meeting of the satyagrahis

Gandhi observed: 'We stand on the threshold of a twilight. . . It behoves every one of us who are Home Rulers to realize the truth at this juncture, to stand for it against any odds and to preach and practise it at any cost unflinchingly. Then only will the correct practice and truth entitle us to the name of Home Rulers.'¹

During the early part of 1918, Gandhi was engaged in various activities for the promotion of social welfare. One of these was membership of a committee appointed by the Government of Bombay to advise how best to deal with the problem of professional beggary in all its aspects. Before, however, the committee's report was ready, the tragic events leading to the Jallianwallah Bagh catastrophe turned him into a non-co-operator, to the chagrin of his colleagues, of whom the writer of this account was one, and the report of the committee had to be issued without his signature.

Whilst he was still co-operating with Government, Gandhi received and accepted an invitation, in April 1918, to attend a war conference convened by the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, at Delhi. 'I recognize,' he wrote in reply, 'that in the hour of its danger we must give, as we have decided to give, ungrudging and unequivocal support to the empire of which we aspire in the near future to be partners in the same sense as the dominions overseas'; if he could make his countrymen retrace their steps, he would, he said, 'make them withdraw all the Congress resolutions and not whisper "Home Rule" or "Responsible Government"'. He 'would make India offer all her able-bodied sons as a sacrifice to the empire at its critical moment', and he knew 'that India, by the very act, would become the most favoured partner in the empire'. 'The Conference means for me,' he added, 'and I believe for many of us, a definite step in the consecration of our lives to the common cause; but ours is a peculiar position. We are today outside the partnership. Ours is a consecration based on hope of better future. I should be untrue to you and to my country, if I did not clearly and unequivocally tell you what that hope is. . . . If I could popularize the use of soul-force, which is but another name for

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

love-force, in place of brute-force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to do its worst. In season and out of season, therefore, I shall discipline myself to express in my life this eternal law of suffering and present it for acceptance to those who care; and if I take part in any other activity, the motive is to show the matchless superiority of that law.'

Throwing himself heart and soul into the campaign for recruiting, Gandhi rendered impressive help to Britain during the crisis. He was helped by Tilak in the recruiting work for some time. This roused among a section of the bureaucracy the suspicion that the professed loyalty of the Congress leaders was a ruse to extort reforms in the administration. But how fervently Gandhi believed that the loyalty of the people to the British Crown could rest securely on home rule is shown in his exhortation that the people should give unstinted support to the rulers in their war effort: 'With a true Home Ruler, it must be an article of faith that the empire must be saved. For in its safety lies the fruition of this fondest hope. How could we wish harm to our would-be partner without hurting ourselves? I wish I could still persuade the country to accept my view that absolute, unconditional and whole-hearted co-operation with the Government on the part of educated India will bring us within sight of our goal of *swaraj* as nothing else will.'¹ To the strenuous work of recruiting he applied himself without any consideration of his health, which rapidly deteriorated, until he had to be removed to his ashram.

In July 1918, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was published. The moderates were prepared to lend it their support; the extremists, however, freely expressed their opinion that it fell far short of expectations. It appeared to the public that an attempt had been made to whittle down the promised reforms, and the politicians and the press denounced what they regarded as a breach of faith. Gandhi, however, kept his views to himself and reserved judgement. Thereupon Srinivasa Sastri, one of the foremost Indian politicians of the day and a world figure in politics, pressed him to give expression to his views.

¹ *ibid.*, p. 280.

His reply, published in the *Times of India*, showed how his mind was then working. Both Montagu and Chelmsford, he said, had been inspired by an honest desire for a due fulfilment of the declaration of 20 August 1917. Any hasty rejection of their effort would be, he urged, a misfortune for the country. It needed, however, to be considerably improved before it was accepted. Then followed various suggestions and criticisms which have now lost their significance. What is necessary for this narrative is to recall the assurance given by him concerning his readiness to recognize the legitimate interests of the British provided they recognized their duty to eliminate the grinding poverty of the masses. 'No scheme of reform could benefit India,' he said, 'that did not recognize that the administration was ruinously expensive.' For him even law, order and good government would be too dearly purchased if the price to be paid was the appalling poverty of the Indian people. 'If this fundamental principle was recognized,' he added, 'there need be no suspicion of our motives, and I think I am perfectly safe in asserting that in every other respect British interests will be as secure in Indian hands as they are in their own.'

Thus spoke the man who seldom allowed his sense of justice to be clouded in any way when dealing with his opponents. It is worth recalling also the simple and stirring words, as yet little known, in which he couched his appeal to his countrymen to fight unto death for victory by the side of the British: 'May God grant us, Home Rulers, the wisdom to see this simple truth. . . . The gateway to our freedom is situated on French soil. . . . If we could but crowd the battlefields of France with an indomitable army of Home Rulers fighting for victory for the cause of the Allies, it would also be a fight for our own cause. We would then have made out an unanswerable case for the granting of home rule not in any distant time or near future, but immediately. My advice, therefore, to the country would be: "Fight unconditionally unto death with Britain for the victory and agitate simultaneously, also unto death, if we must, for the reforms that we deserve." . . . It may not be impossible to gain our end by sheer obstruction and destructive agitation. But it is easy enough to see that we shall at the same time

reap ill-will between the British and the Indian elements, not a particularly cohesive cement for binding would-be partners.¹

In the light of this magnificent declaration of policy, how short-sighted and suicidal appears the attitude of the British administrators! They failed to realize that in deprecating and antagonizing this high-souled critic of British rule they were undermining the foundations of Britain's future relationship with India.

On 25 August 1918, Tilak wrote to Gandhi pressing him to attend the Congress session. In reply Gandhi said that although there was an improvement in his health, he did not intend to attend the session. Nor did he intend to go to the conference convened by the moderates. He believed that they could render a great service to India by devoting themselves to the work of recruitment. They should also accept the principles of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, state clearly whatever alterations they wanted to propose and fight to the death to get those changes accepted. 'It is obvious,' he added, 'that the Moderates will not accept this idea. And even if Mrs Besant and you accept it, you will not fight in the manner I want to fight. Mrs Besant has said that she is not a satyagrahi. You have accepted satyagraha as the weapon of the weak. I do not want to be under any illusion. Nor do I want to create agitation in the Congress, parting company with you two. I have this faith, that if my penance is perfect, you and Mrs Besant will accept my principle. I can have patience.' In response to Surendranath Bannerjea's invitation, he wrote that he held strong and probably peculiar views not shared by many of the leaders. He implicitly believed that if they were to devote their attention exclusively to recruiting, they would gain full responsible government in a year's time, if not sooner. 'Instead of allowing our utterly ignorant countrymen to enlist *nolens volens*,' he wrote, 'we should get an army of Home Rulers who would be willing soldiers with the knowledge that they will be soldiering for the sake of their country. . . . I should like a party in the country that would be simply pledged to these two propositions: helping the Government on the one hand in the prosecu-

¹ *Times of India*, 18 July 1918.

tion of the war, and enforcing the national demand, on the other. I do not believe that at a critical moment like this we should be satisfied with a patched-up truce between the so-called extremists and the so-called moderates, each giving up a little in favour of the other. I should like a clear enunciation of the policy of each group or party, and naturally those who by the intrinsic merit of their case and ceaseless agitation make themselves a power in the land will carry the day before the House of Commons.¹

While the ardent supporter of the war effort was still convalescing, Vallabhbhai Patel, who had given up his practice as a barrister and become Gandhi's right-hand man, brought news that Germany had suddenly collapsed. The commissioner of the district sent word that recruiting was no longer necessary. Gandhi's valuable work was rapidly forgotten, and in the years to come he was to be feared by officialdom as a dangerous rebel. In fact, his very meekness and simplicity were to prove forces powerful enough to shake the foundations of British rule in India.

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 283-4.

II

From Dyarchy to Anarchy

DURING the war, the Defence of India Act had armed the executive with extraordinary powers to control the press, to deport editors and other individuals at will and to set up special tribunals to judge political crimes. When these purely war-time measures lapsed, the Government of India needed special powers to deal with anarchists in various parts of the country, particularly in Bengal. A committee appointed to inquire into the matter, with Mr Justice Rowlatt, an English judge, its chairman, recommended that in certain notified areas cases of political crime should be tried without jury. It also recommended that provincial governments should be invested with powers of internment. Two Bills embodying these proposals were published in the *Gazette of India* on 18 January 1919. It was an irony of fate, indeed, that on the eve of the grant of a large measure of responsible government a repressive piece of legislation should have been brought forward. Despite the protests of people of all shades of opinion and the unanimous opposition of the Indian members of the Legislative Council, the Bills were passed on 17 March.

The Rowlatt Act was a turning-point in Gandhi's career. He called for a nation-wide hartal¹ on 6 April. The day went off quietly. On 8 April he set out to direct the civil disobedience movement in the Punjab and was turned back on the following day. A false report that he had been arrested led to serious rioting. In Ahmedabad, shops were looted, railway lines damaged, telegraph wires mutilated, a police sergeant was beaten to death and a magistrate burnt alive. In Lahore, portraits of the King and Queen were burned, and at Amritsar scores of attacks were made on Europeans. On 12 April General Dyer

¹ The ancient custom of closing shops and refusing to trade, in protest against a ruler's high-handed behaviour.

issued a proclamation that any assembly of four or more persons would be treated as an unlawful meeting. The order was defied at Jallianwallah Bagh, Amritsar, by a meeting of about 5,000 persons. Dyer arrived with his troops and opened fire. Within two minutes many people were killed and wounded. As a result of an inquiry held in November, Dyer was found to have exceeded his orders and placed on the retired list. The relations of the victims of the tragedy were amply compensated. Even so, this and other incidents increased the tension between the Government and the people.

In 1920, an extraordinary pan-Islamic movement arising from Britain's post-war treatment of Turkey, agitated the minds of Muslims everywhere. The Muslims of India had been cut off for centuries from the general body of the Islamic world, and knew very little and cared still less about Turkey. In fact an Indian globe-trotter, Haji Sulleman Shah Muhammed, told the author in 1902 that when he greeted the Muslim inhabitants of Samarkand and Bukhara, in Russian Turkistan, as a co-religionist, they became aware for the first time that there were millions of Muslims in India. Whether there was any contact between the Muslims of India and Turkey during the days of Muslim rule in India, we do not know; but we do know that the Mogul emperors did not recognize the Sultan of Turkey as the religious head of the followers of Islam all over the world. During the days of the British, if Indian Muslims received any news at all of events in Turkey, it was through the British themselves, who were the first to magnify Turkey in the eyes of Indian Muslims during the Crimean War and again in 1878, when troops were sent from India to Malta, in defence of Turkey in anticipation of another war against Russia. The spirit of fierce nationalism kindled among the young Turks by pan-Islamic propaganda, Italy's capture of Tripoli, and the Balkan Wars, stirred the religious emotionalism of the Muslims in India. During the 1914 war, even before Turkey joined Germany, speculation was rife as to whether the followers of Islam in India would rally round their spiritual head. The Calcutta paper *Habl-ul-Matin* stressed the duty of every Muslim towards the Khalifa, the vicegerent of God on

earth. Many Muslims, including the men in the army, began to feel that too great a strain was imposed on their loyalty in being asked to fight against the Khalifa.

The draft Treaty of Sèvres contained proposals curtailing the temporal powers of the Khalifa. These were adroitly exploited to rouse the indignation of the Indian Muslim community against the British. The peace proposals, it was contended, went counter to their religious convictions. The Congress leaders backed the agitation, for here was a splendid opportunity to cement Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi was not slow to seize it. A deputation of Hindu and Muslim leaders waited on the Viceroy, who could give them no assurance of a revision or modification of the peace terms. He agreed, however, to give all facilities to a deputation that it was proposed to send to England to get redress.

Many fraternal meetings and consultations took place between the Muslim and Hindu leaders. Gandhi keenly participated in the discussions. On 1 August 1920, he addressed a letter to Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, protesting against 'the wrong done to the religious sentiments' of the community. Placing all his cards on the table, he gave notice of his determination to organize a non-co-operation campaign. The attitude of the Government on the question of the Punjab atrocities was urged as an additional reason for this decision. Gandhi had not, however, lost hope that the Viceroy would see that justice was done, and he suggested that a conference of recognized leaders be held to find a way to placate the Muslims and pacify the people of the Punjab. The Viceroy's reply to this ultimatum was couched in language which lacked official restraint and traditional decorum. Not content with characterizing the threatened non-co-operation campaign as futile, ill-advised, impractical and visionary, it went so far as to say that it was 'intrinsically inane' and 'most foolish of all foolish schemes'. 'Unfortunately for His Excellency,' retorted Gandhi, 'the movement is likely to grow with ridicule as it is certain to flourish on repression.... A movement cannot be inane that is conducted by men of action as, I claim, the members of the non-co-operation committee are.' It could be characterized as visionary, he added,

only if there was no response from the people, whereas it had the response, and 'it was for the nation to return an effective answer by organized non-co-operation and change ridicule into respect'.¹

Organized non-co-operation as a means of meeting the Khilafat and Punjab issues was discussed at a special meeting of the Congress held at Calcutta in the first week of September. Lala Lajpat Rai, who had just returned from America, presided. It was resolved that a beginning should be made with (a) surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation of nominated posts in local bodies; (b) refusal to attend levees, durbars and other official and semi-official functions held by government officials or in their honour; (c) gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges in the various provinces; (d) gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers, and establishment of private arbitration courts by them for the settlement of private disputes; (e) refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia; (f) withdrawal by candidates from election to the reformed councils and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for any candidate who, despite Congress advice, offered himself for election, and (g) boycott of foreign goods.

The Muslim League also held a special session at Calcutta, on 7 September, and resolved to join the national movement. 'There is no course open to the people,' said Jinnah, who presided, 'except to inaugurate the policy of non-co-operation, though not necessarily the programme of Mr Gandhi.' With Shaukat Ali and other leaders Gandhi toured extensively through the Punjab, Sind and Madras, addressing huge meetings on the Khilafat embroglio and preaching revolt. Slowly but steadily the agitation produced results: students began to withdraw from schools and colleges; title-holders returned their decorations; government employees abandoned their posts and respected lawyers such as Motilal Nehru and M. R. Jayakar resigned their practices; the National University of Gujarat was founded at Ahmedabad. Those who had ridiculed the campaign were dumb-founded. Gandhi had declared that swaraj could be won within

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, vol. III, p. 11.

a year. The bureaucracy began to take serious notice. It issued a communiqué to the effect that the leaders of the agitation had so far not been harmed, but that orders had now been issued to arrest anyone whose words should stir up revolt or incite people in other ways to violence. Although this meant his imminent arrest, Gandhi welcomed the announcement as the first triumph of the campaign and instructed the people to keep calm and refrain from resorting to violence even under grave provocation. His followers also prepared for the fray and determined not to allow any restrictions on the pace of the movement's progress.

The annual meeting of the Congress was held on 26 December at Nagpur. As Gandhi had asked that the non-co-operation resolution passed at the Calcutta session initiating the movement be given a finishing touch, the Congress declared that the whole or any part of the scheme should be put in force at any time as might be determined by the Congress or its all-India Committee. It was resolved, as proposed by Gandhi, that the object of the Indian National Congress was 'the attainment of swaraj by the people of India *by all legitimate and peaceful means*', including all the techniques and methods developed for satyagraha. The proceedings of the Congress made it very clear that it regarded non-co-operation, including refusal to pay taxes, essential. The moderates tried to rally as many as possible to the flag of co-operation, and to this end Mrs Besant and her colleagues endeavoured to present a united front with the Liberals. At a meeting of the Liberal Federation, C. Y. Chintamani, who presided, declared: 'Our opposition to non-co-operation springs from our conviction of its futility, the harm it would do to our cause and our country.' At the first elections under the reforms scheme held in November 1920, the Liberals entered the councils, became ministers and accepted high office.

In February 1921, the Duke of Connaught visited India to inaugurate the new constitution by opening the Legislative Assembly at Delhi. He had brought with him a message from the King-Emperor intended to cheer the loyal and conciliate the disaffected sections of the people. To this message, proclaiming the beginning of swaraj within the Empire and the widest scope for progress to the liberty enjoyed by the Dominions, the Duke,

'as an old friend of India', added a personal appeal, not to be coldly or critically interpreted. He appealed to all, British and Indians, to bury the mistakes of the past and to join hands and work together to realize the hopes kindled by the reforms. But the extremist section of the Congress remained adamant and boycotted the new councils. What might have been greeted as a boon a few years ago seemed now a sham and a delusion. The war had resulted in the creation of several new European national states; the Dominions forming the British Commonwealth had been given equal status with Britain; a new spirit of nationalism was astir in Asian countries such as Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan and China: no wonder that Indian leaders refused to acquiesce in a scheme designed to confer nationalist status at some distant date. Many of the old leaders had passed away. Tilak, whose motto was to take what he could get and to agitate for more unto death, was no more. Gandhi alone dominated the scene: his leadership was contested by none.

The moderates, though no less insistent than Gandhi in their demand for an extension of responsible government, refused to follow him along the extremist path. Although faced with many handicaps, they joined the councils. As ministers in charge of 'transferred portfolios' they were hampered by lack of funds in carrying out constructive programmes for nation-building activities, but within the field transferred to them, backed loyally by the members of the civil service, they were able to do useful work and promote several beneficial legislative measures. The Central legislature repealed the obnoxious Press Act of 1910 and the Rowlatt Act. India's political status in the British Commonwealth was recognized. She was represented on the Imperial Conference and became a member of the League of Nations. For the first time in her history an Indian, S. P. Sinha, was appointed Governor, of Bihar and Orissa. Thus, clumsy though the machinery of government was, dyarchy proved workable.

The new constitution could not, however, be said to have achieved its main objective. The principal non-co-operating party made progress towards the goal of Dominion status impossible, and even more damaging to the constitution was the

communal discord and strife which disfigured the public life of India. An example is the ferocious attack of the Moplahs, a Muslim community of partly Arab blood with its stronghold in Malabar, on their Hindu neighbours in the fear that Gandhi's swaraj would mean Hindu raj. Such disturbances showed the lack of that sense of nationhood which transcends geographical and communal barriers, and which was absolutely essential for the successful working of the new machinery of government. Despite its political awakening, the population riven by creeds and castes had not yet acquired the sense of allegiance to the national cause and subordination of sectional interests to the common weal.

Lord Reading succeeded Lord Chelmsford in 1921. In the same year, the Prince of Wales paid a visit to India. The Congress, which was by now completely in the hands of the extremists, boycotted the visit and staged demonstrations against it, which ended in rioting and many arrests. In the following year, at Chauri-Chaura in the United Provinces, a mob of villagers set fire to a police-station, and about twenty policemen were burnt alive. Gandhi suspended the civil disobedience movement; but such disturbances led to his trial and he was sentenced to six years' simple imprisonment. 'It would be impossible,' said C. N. Broomfield, the English judge, in convicting him, 'to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a great patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and of even saintly life. I have to deal with you in one character only. . . . It is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law who has, by his own admission, broken the law and committed what to an ordinary man must appear to be grave offences against the State. I do not forget that you have constantly preached against violence and that you have on many occasions, as I am willing to believe, done much to prevent violence.'¹

As a result of serious illness, Gandhi was released two years later, in 1924. This act of grace on the part of the Government should have eased the political situation, but in the meanwhile

¹ Ahmedabad Sessions Case No. 45 of 1922.

other incidents had taken place vitiating the atmosphere. The repudiation of the Khalifa by the Turks themselves showed on how fragile a framework of sophistry the Khilafat movement had been based. It brought about a collapse of the short-lived *entente* between the Muslims and the Hindus, and the communal riots which followed made the most optimistic among the people despair of Hindu-Muslim unity. By the middle of 1923, communal riots were of frequent occurrence, marked by murder, arson and plunder. There was a lull in 1925, but the following year witnessed a fresh series of riots.

In the meanwhile, a section of Congressmen, led by Pandit Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, formed within the Congress a group known as the Swarajya Party, favouring council entry. The 'no-changers' frowned on the move, but at a special session of the Congress a compromise resolution was adopted permitting the Swarajists to enter the legislatures. In the elections that followed, they dominated two of the provincial councils and with forty-five members formed a powerful bloc in the Central Legislative Assembly. Refusing to co-operate in the formation of the ministries of transferred subjects in Bengal and the Central Provinces, the members of the party demanded in the Central Assembly a representative round table conference to consider a scheme of constitutional reforms for the establishment of full responsible government in India. A reforms inquiry committee, known as the Muddiman Committee, was thereupon appointed in 1924. Motilal Nehru declined to accept a seat on the Committee as its scope was limited by its terms of reference. The Committee was divided in opinion, and two reports were therefore submitted. The main difference between them was in regard to the minority's recommendation for the appointment of a Royal Commission with a larger scope of inquiry to enable it to make recommendations providing for automatic constitutional progress. Lord Reading's Government was, however, of opinion that the time had not yet come for the appointment of such a commission. Possibilities of a round table conference of Indians alone were then explored, but nothing practical could be done until the termination of Reading's viceroyalty in 1926.

With the advent of Lord Irwin to succeed Lord Reading there was a marked, earnest attempt to bring peace to the country. A man of deep religious convictions, with a humane outlook on life, he could appreciate the stirrings of Gandhi's heart and was determined to bring about an understanding between the nationalists and the authorities. The overriding need of the hour was close co-operation between Indians and British in evolving a new constitution for the people. Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, recognized the urgency of it. Although there was still time to go before the appointment of the parliamentary commission to review the working of the 1919 reforms, as laid down in the Act of 1919, he decided to antedate it and chose for the inquiry a small parliamentary body of seven members taken exclusively from the two Houses of Parliament. Ordinarily, a purely parliamentary commission would not have provoked adverse comment; but this was an inquiry that affected the whole political future of India. To exclude Indians from it, particularly the eminent Indian, Lord Sinha, a member of the House of Lords and thus qualified for inclusion, was a fatal blunder. Considering that they were vitally concerned in the inquiry, Indians vehemently demanded that they should be heard through their representatives. By way of compromise, Sir John Simon, the Chairman of the Commission, suggested that the Commission should take the form of a 'joint free conference' between the seven British members and representatives chosen by the Indian Legislature, with himself as President; but neither the Congress nor the Legislative Assembly was satisfied.

Despite the boycott, the Commission paid two visits to India. Its report, made after prolonged and exhaustive study, gave a luminous exposition of the entire problem and indicated the basis of further progress. The Commission frankly observed that 'the political sentiment which is widespread among all educated Indians is the expression of a demand for equality with Europeans'. It was, it pointed out, a great deal more than a matter of personal feelings: it was 'the claim of the East for the recognition of Status'. Complete provincial autonomy was recommended together with some form of federal government at

the Centre, embracing not only British India but the States as well. The two were so inextricably connected that the constitution should, the Commission suggested, provide an open door whereby, when it seemed good to them, the ruling princes might enter on just and reasonable terms. British India in itself could not provide the foundation of any permanent system of self-government. An all-India federation was, therefore, the best ultimate solution of India's constitutional problem. To create a self-governing union of British India alone would destroy all hope of national unity and would put the princes in a position altogether untenable.

Sound though the recommendations of the Commission were, political India and the people generally were not satisfied, as it had failed to recommend what the country had been demanding for a number of years — responsible government at the Centre. Ever since the principle of self-determination within the Empire had been enunciated at the end of the 1914 war, popular movements in favour of self-government had been stimulated in several parts of the world. But for India the hope was not new : the doctrine of trusteeship had been proposed by the rulers during the closing days of the eighteenth century and never abrogated thereafter, although found irksome on occasion. Training for self-government, implicit in the doctrine, had been given cheerfully to the people for a hundred years and more. The right to decide when the time had arrived to free their wards to govern presumably vested in the trustees ; but the doctrine of self-determination since embraced by the whole world gave the wards the right to decide. If the trustees agreed, the greater their glory. If they faltered, the right to wrest their freedom lay with the wards.

Even as the Simon Commission was conducting its inquiry and formulating its proposals, the left wing of the Congress was reinforced by Jawaharlal Nehru. Little could the Commission imagine that its report, howsoever just and fair it might appear, would soon be torn to pieces by this newcomer, or that almost before the ink was dry upon it he would demand complete independence. For Nehru would have no more negotiations. *Purna swaraj*, complete independence, was to be achieved by a

nation-wide campaign of civil disobedience. 'Independence for us means,' he declared in his presidential address at the 1930 Lahore Congress, 'complete freedom from British domination and British imperialism. Having attained our freedom, I have no doubt that India will welcome all attempts at world co-operation and federation, and will even agree to give up part of her own independence to a larger group of which she is an equal member.'

The demand was justified, and the British knew it. From the day they undertook to teach the common language of English to all Indian youth and propagate their own ideals of political freedom, they had foreseen the demand. On that day were laid the foundations of India's unity. And by giving her unity and peace within her borders, the rule of law and the rights of the individual under the law, the British had set themselves the arduous task of preparing the people for self-government. They were now essaying the far more arduous task of evolving a form of democratic constitution under which the peoples of the country could live together and manage their own affairs. Such a complex and confounding problem could not be solved by catch phrases. It required mutual understanding and goodwill, not only between British and Indians but also between the different Indian communities and parties themselves. But there was no accredited organization that could speak in the name of India or put forward an agreed demand.

The Lahore session showed what an accretion of strength Jawaharlal's entry into the Congress was for the left-wingers. The resolutions adopted at the session left no doubt that the next few years would be most critical for the bureaucracy. The central and provincial legislatures were to be boycotted. The machinery of government was to be paralysed by refusal to pay taxes; all government officials, civil and military, were asked to resign their posts; government schools, colleges and the law courts were to be boycotted; liquor shops and establishments selling foreign goods were to be picketed by a body of youths known as Congress volunteers. When swaraj was won, the nationalist government would repudiate debts contracted by the Government of India not in the interests of the country but

for the purposes of the British Empire. The 26th of January was to be observed annually as Independence Day.

On the morning of 12 March 1930, a small, frail, bent old man, clear-eyed and firm of step, with only a strip of cloth to cover his body, led a procession to the sea, to violate the law prohibiting the unlicensed manufacture of salt by boiling sea water. The Indian people and the nations of the world watched with lively interest the historic march to Dandi. It marked the beginning of the preparation of illicit salt throughout Gujerat. The first civil disobedience campaign, thus launched, spread like wild fire; there were riots and bloodshed in various parts of the country; Gandhi and his followers, numbering about 2,000, were arrested. In a terrorist campaign in Bengal several officials were murdered in cold blood; civil resisters went to prison in hundreds every day; hundreds more, including women, came forward to take their place and court arrest. The Government's calculations were upset altogether by the intensity and ferocity of the campaign. All classes of trade were seriously affected; British government in India was being steadily paralysed. Lord Irwin considered it his duty to put down the revolt by such repressive measures as his government could devise. The Europeans in India, particularly the Calcutta group, clamoured for more and more stringent repression.

Thus was India drifting from dyarchy to anarchy. Never before had the political situation looked so gloomy for both India and Britain. The hopes of the Congress to wrest freedom by non-violent struggle had not materialized. On the contrary, the events had retarded progress and involved the national movement in a struggle with the authorities which was marked by violence on both sides. Britain was powerful enough to suppress the revolt, to crush the Congress, though not the Congress spirit, and rule by the sword for a good long time. But was this to be the end and crowning achievement of the British connexion? For how long, moreover, could Britain continue to put down by force a people qualified for responsible government and armed so indomitably with the will to resist injustice and repression?

The Round Table Conference and After

WHILE, as head of the administration, the Viceroy had to suppress violence, as a man endowed with a profound sense of justice Irwin appreciated the patriotic impulse of the people and recognized the justice of their demands. He was not the man to place prestige above reason and justice. As a far-sighted statesman, moreover, he saw the futility of repression without an earnest attempt at reconciliation. To prevent further deterioration in the situation, it was necessary to regain contact with the political leaders and restore confidence in British justice. 'Howsoever emphatically we may condemn the civil disobedience movement, we should, I am satisfied,' he frankly told the Calcutta Association, 'make a profound mistake if we underestimate the genuine and powerful meaning of nationalism that is today animating much of Indian thought, and for this no complete or permanent cure has ever been or ever will be found in strong action by the Government.' For months he had been endeavouring to change the war-like attitude of the Congress into one of concord and co-operation. Towards this end he allowed the two eminent peace-makers of the day, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. R. Jayakar, to see Gandhi and Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru in jail and to negotiate for a settlement between the Government and the Congress. The negotiations, however, fell through, as the Congress leaders pitched their price for peace too high. The warmongers among the British and Indians alike heaved a sigh of relief.

Meanwhile, the Simon Commission was earnestly at work. A favourable atmosphere had to be created for the reception of its report. The Congress had threatened a renewal of civil disobedience, but there were indications that the other political parties would co-operate in the task of making a new constitution. Irwin thought that it would be prudent to encourage this



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The Simon Commission's report pilloried, 1928

trend by a clear and encouraging statement of British intentions. He therefore proceeded to London for consultation with the Prime Minister (Ramsay MacDonald) and Sir John Simon as to whether such a statement should be made, and if so in what form, and whether the terms of reference of the Commission should be extended to include the question of an all-India federation of which the princely states would form an important part. The result was general agreement on the extension of the Commission's terms of reference and on the proposal to convene a round table conference. As regards a statement on Dominion status, Viscount Templewood, who as Sir Samuel Hoare was later Secretary of State for India, states¹ that Simon at first seemed ready to accept it but finally came down definitely against it. Reading and Lloyd George, who were also consulted, were even more strongly opposed to it. Baldwin, however, supported Irwin. MacDonald ignored the opposition; accordingly, on his return to India, the Viceroy made a statement embodying the following declaration:

In view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and in India regarding the interpretation to be placed on the intentions of the British Government in enacting the Statute of 1919, I am authorized on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgement it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status.

The effect of these words in India was excellent. But in England, it was otherwise. The statement, says Templewood, which to him seemed unobjectionable, started an explosion that left a lasting mark on British and Indian politics for many years. In Great Britain the use of the sacred and ritual phrase 'Dominion Status' became the shibboleth that divided Churchill from Baldwin, and the diehards from the main body of the Conservative Party. 'How,' they asked, 'could India, with its communal differences, its many languages and religions, its Indian States and British Indian Provinces, and last but not

¹ *Nine Troubled Years*, p. 45.

least, its inability to defend itself, ever become a Dominion after the manner of Canada, Australia and South Africa?’

‘The Conservative Shadow Cabinet was at once summoned. We met in an uncomfortable room in the Conservative offices in Palace Chambers. Criticism of the statement, started by Birkenhead (a previous Secretary of State) and supported by Austen Chamberlain, at once became very bitter. Baldwin obviously approved of Irwin’s action. He had, in fact, already agreed with it in principle at the time of the discussions between Irwin, Simon and MacDonald. He had not, however, then seen the actual words in their final form....His answer, therefore, to MacDonald was a perfunctory agreement provided that Simon also agreed. MacDonald and Benn, the Secretary of State, thereupon authorized the Viceroy to make the statement without obtaining Simon’s approval. Not unnaturally, Simon was greatly annoyed. Baldwin also had been placed in a difficulty. His condition had been ignored, but none the less, as he fully approved of the statement, he had no intention of repudiating it. All that he could do in the circumstances was to sit back, listen to Birkenhead’s scathing criticisms, and obtain a letter from MacDonald in which it was made clear that the Viceroy’s words meant no change in British policy. I also failed to see anything either new or revolutionary in the statement, and I took two early opportunities in the House of Commons to pay a tribute to the Viceroy’s wisdom.’¹

The recommendations of the Simon Commission failed to give a definite lead or satisfy Indian political leaders. In British circles the belief strengthened that responsible government should be tried out in the provinces before it was extended to the Centre. ‘My correspondence with Irwin,’ says Templewood, ‘made me doubt from the first whether reforms that did no more than grant provincial autonomy could satisfy an Indian demand for full equality of status. Baldwin, who had no doubts at all, was convinced that if we were to keep India within the Commonwealth, we must be prepared to go much further and faster than most of his colleagues were ready to agree. It was no doubt because we thought alike, that he asked me to be one

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 45-6.

of the Conservative representatives on the Round Table Conference.¹

The first session of the Conference was opened in December 1930 by King George V in St. James's Palace. All the important parties except Congress were represented. Of the 89 delegates there were 57 from British India, 16 from the princely states and 16 representatives of the British Government and the Opposition in the two Houses of Parliament. At the outset the Indian delegation rejected the Commission's negative attitude towards an advance at the Centre. The Maharaja of Bikaner voiced the sentiments of all of them when he declared, 'The passion for an equal status in the eyes of the world is the dominant force amongst all thinking Indians today.' If the British would give India Dominion status, the cry of Independence would die of itself, said M. R. Jayakar, the most learned among the Indian Liberals of the day. This, however, implied an Indian federation, a union of British and Indian India and the withdrawal of all British control. The princes were ready, said the Nawab of Bhopal, to join in a federation, provided that the federal governments were, with some temporary reservations, responsible to the federal legislature. This declaration, astonishing as it was to most of the delegates, removed such misgivings as still existed among the British delegates as to the practicability of immediate introduction of responsible government at the Centre. It was believed that the princes would be a stabilizing factor in the new constitution. It had also a heartening effect on the Muslim delegates who felt that the presence of the states at the Centre would strengthen their position *vis-à-vis* the Hindu majority. On the thorny question of the withdrawal of British control, the British and Indian delegates were alike of opinion that there must be a period of transition.

An aside in Templewood's story of the first session of the Conference throws light on the obstructive and iconoclastic attitude adopted by Churchill throughout this depressing episode. Of the many disconcerting problems then worrying the British Government, none was more acute than that of the

¹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

growing anti-British feeling and unrest in India. Never before had Indo-British relations been so alarmingly strained as they were in those critical days. The convening of the Conference was mooted in the hope of improving the political atmosphere and restoring friendly feelings. The idea underlying the proposal to give India Dominion status was welcomed by the British public and the British residents in India, including the business houses and chambers of commerce. But Churchill's Indian obsessions made him stand as a huge boulder blocking the path of the country's constitutional advance and vitiating further the relations between the two countries. Not one of the Indian delegates was prepared to accept the main Simon Commission recommendation without simultaneous changes in the Central Government. The princes in particular stated unequivocally that they would only federate with a responsible Indian government. 'I immediately insisted,' says Templewood, 'with both Baldwin and my other Conservative colleagues on the significance of a new and unexpected development, that had not been contemplated in the Simon Report or in the despatch of the Government of India that had commented on it.'¹

Templewood reported the movements of the Conference to his Conservative colleagues and argued in favour of accepting the demand for an all-India federation. He developed his views in a memorandum in which he endeavoured to show the advantages of federation and the kind of safeguards that were needed to ensure its security. Churchill strongly resented any suggestion of responsibility at the Centre, however carefully safeguarded, and refused to support the proposal for federation. This was the origin of Churchill's breach with Baldwin and his relentless opposition to the Government of India Act. Each day's delay in passing the Act compromised the chance of settlement. 'If the Act had reached the Statute Book in 1933 instead of 1935, I am convinced,' adds Templewood, 'that it would have been in effective operation before the war started. Even more serious than delay was the atmosphere created by years of Parliamentary wrangle, during which Churchill was constantly attacking and I was constantly defending the safe-

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

guards in the Bill, with the inevitable result that Indians came to believe that instead of giving them the fullest possible opportunity for obtaining responsible government, we were intent upon tying them up in a 'strait-jacket.'

In fairness to Churchill, let us try to realize how his mind was working during those days. Early in his life, when he spent five years soldiering in India, there was trouble on the North-West Frontier. Keen on serving in the Indian Army, Churchill fought in the Malakand expedition as an officer correspondent. His relations with Indian soldiers were cordial and he carried pleasant memories of the country. In 1917, when the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were adumbrated, he was Minister of Munitions in the British Government. There is no evidence to show that he was then against the famous declaration of August 1917, promising the progressive realization of responsible government in India. Ten years later, when he stoutly opposed what he regarded as his party's surrender to Gandhi, he was reminded by Lord Zetland, one of the Conservatives who attended the Round Table Conference, that as a prominent member of the government which framed the declaration he was among 'the first to encourage Indians to look forward to the attainment of Dominion Status'. He thereupon promptly disclaimed responsibility for the framing of the declaration. Zetland pointed out that he was referring not only to the fact that Churchill was then a member of the Government and therefore responsible for the policy embodied in the declaration of 1917 but to the speech which he had delivered at the Empire Conference of 1921 in the presence of the prime ministers of the Dominions and representatives of India. He had then spoken appreciatively of India as moving forward under the Montagu scheme towards Dominion status and had added that he 'looked forward confidently to the days when the Indian government and people could have assumed fully and completely their Dominion Status'. The sentiments underlying such a statement should have entitled Churchill to rank with the sympathetic and sagacious British statesmen of the early nineteenth century who had visualized a self-governing India. How did it happen that within a few years he should

become the inveterate opponent of Irwin's proposal for a round table conference and that he should repudiate the declaration of 1917 as regarding the attainment of Dominion status as the natural issue of India's constitutional progress? In the elections of 1922, the Liberals suffered a landslide. The party was rent in two, with Lloyd George and Asquith pulling different ways. Rather than remain in the defunct Liberal Party, Churchill joined the Conservatives. To understand the situation an examination of his parliamentary career is necessary. In 1903, the Conservative Party disintegrated during the controversy over the policy of imperial preference, advocated by Joseph Chamberlain and designed to assist Empire manufactures in meeting the competition of foreign production. It meant the abandonment of the traditional British policy of free trade. The Chamberlain bombshell split the party into two wings—Protectionist and Free Trade. Churchill stoutly opposed the protectionists. Then, one evening, he crossed the floor of the House of Commons and occupied a seat in the corner of the Opposition front bench. Balfour, the Conservative Prime Minister, tried hard to prevent his Cabinet from breaking up, but he could not reconcile the conflicting viewpoints and had to resign office. Campbell-Bannerman formed a Liberal Ministry, and Churchill was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Colonies. He then became a member of the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade. Now a colleague of Morley and Lloyd George, he became a Liberal of Liberals. His appointment as First Lord of the Admiralty and then as Minister of Munitions and Colonial Secretary followed in quick succession. His speech about India moving towards full and complete Dominion status was a logical concomitant. Then came the reverses in the 1923 elections after which any two parties combining could out-vote the third. Asquith with the Liberals and Ramsay MacDonald with the Socialists combined, and Asquith proposed installing the Socialists on the Treasury Bench. But association with socialism was anathema to Churchill, and he decided to sever his connexion with the Liberals and return to the Conservatives. The prodigal son found a warm welcome awaiting him. Stanley Baldwin appointed him Chancellor of the Exchequer in his

second administration; but in the election that followed the Socialists won the battle, and Ramsay MacDonald, whom Churchill had ridiculed as 'the boneless wonder of his age', became Premier. The mild liberalism of Baldwin impelled Churchill to challenge the leadership of the Conservative party: never was he so out of sympathy with the mood of the people as during this period of his life.

In this state of mind he regarded Irwin's efforts to seek the co-operation of Gandhi in drawing up a new constitution as an ignominious act of surrender. It was not opposition to the aspirations of India but the spirit of surrender to the Congress methods of demanding reforms that provoked him to ridicule the idea of asking Gandhi to participate in the work of the Round Table Conference. The Government of India had imprisoned Gandhi, he said, and now they were sitting outside his cell door, begging him to help them out of their difficulties. What could be more humiliating than the spectacle of the King's representative in India conversing on equal terms with 'a half-naked fakir'? In an address delivered at the Albert Hall (18 March 1931) he vented his indignation not only at the surrender to Gandhi but also at the nature of the conversations and agreements. In his excitement he did not realize that his vision was blurred and that he was making statements that were grossly exaggerated and unfair. 'What spectacle could be more strange, more monstrous in its perversity,' he asked, 'than to see the Viceroy and the high officials and agents of the Crown in India labouring with all their influence and authority to unite and weave together into a confederacy all the crores adverse and hostile to our rule in India? One after another our friends and the elements on which we ought to rely in India are chilled, baffled and dismayed and finally even encouraged to band themselves together with those who wish to drive us out of the country.' It was, he proclaimed, a hideous act of self-mutilation, astounding to every nation of the world. The princes, the Europeans, the Muslims, the depressed classes, the Anglo-Indians, did not know what to do or where to turn in the face of their apparent desertion by Great Britain. No wonder that they tried in desperation to make what terms were possible with

the triumphant Brahmin oligarchy! Gandhi stood, he said, for the expulsion of Britain from India, for the permanent exclusion of British trade from India, for the substitution of Brahmin domination for British rule in India. 'You will never be able,' he added, 'to come to terms with Gandhi.'

It is unnecessary to rebut the misstatements and half-truths in this tirade. Gandhi had repeatedly stated that he was not against the legitimate interests of the British; he had never advocated their expulsion; far from it, if the people were given the right to govern themselves, he would welcome their presence in India, their friendship and co-operation. Those who knew the composition of the Congress could never describe Congress aspirations as Brahmin domination or Hindu rule. But from this time onward Churchill did not hesitate to use India as a convenient stick with which to beat his political opponents or colleagues with whose views he could not agree.

To resume the story of the Conference. At the meetings of the Minorities Sub-Committee the question of separate electorates was hotly debated. A separate electorate was for the first time claimed on behalf of the depressed classes. At the close of the session this was the only question left unsettled, and the Conference was concluded with a word of admonition by the Prime Minister that it was the duty of the different communities to come to an agreement among themselves.

Despite the communal deadlock, the first session of the Conference was regarded as a notable success. It was, however, felt in England as well as in India that it could not be considered at all representative so long as India's leading political party, without whose co-operation no new constitution could function satisfactorily, was left out. India was in the thick of the civil disobedience struggle, and the chances of Congress co-operation were most slender. Nevertheless, being anxious that Gandhi and his colleagues should participate in the work of the Conference, Irwin persuaded Gandhi to go to London and attend the second session. In the spring of 1931, a truce was arranged. On behalf of the Indian Government, the Viceroy offered to release political prisoners, withdraw the obnoxious ordinances, restore confiscated property and raise the ban on peaceful picketing.

On behalf of the Congress, Gandhi agreed to suspend civil disobedience.

An anecdote given in Irwin's memoirs¹ throws an interesting sidelight on the characters of Gandhi and the Viceroy. It was a very delicate predicament in which they found themselves placed, as each was exposing himself to the shafts of criticism from foes and friends alike. A few hours after they had reached an agreement, Gandhi went back to the Viceroy and said, 'Jawaharlal is unhappy about the agreement. He thinks I have unwittingly sold India.' Irwin advised him not to let it worry him unduly. 'I have no doubt,' he added, 'that very soon I shall be getting cables from England, telling me that in Churchill's opinion I have sold Great Britain. Such double criticism would suggest that what we have done is about right.' These words cheered Gandhi. The critics in England were lonely voices. 'Dimly, inarticulately, unconsciously, the instinct of the British people was as usual guiding them wisely. Though they might not have been able to put it into words,' says Irwin, 'they realized that the choice lay between power, which had served well from the days of Clive, and influence which, if we could use it aright in the changed conditions of the twentieth century, would serve us better. And they knew that, of the two, influence was the more securely founded and the more enduring.'²

Oddly enough, the opposition to the Gandhi-Irwin pact was more vehement in the Congress than in official circles. The Congress hot-heads acquiesced in the pact with the greatest reluctance, since they believed the contest had gone far in their favour and would go further in the near future. Civil disobedience was slowly but surely demoralizing the Government, and it seemed a calamity that the battle was being called off when victory was in sight. Officially, the Congress was committed to accepting Dominion status if granted at once, a resolution of the Working Committee having declared that the nation must be given control over all its affairs including foreign policy and defence.

¹ Earl of Halifax: *Fulness of Days*, p. 151.

² *ibid.*

The pact marked a turning-point in the history of India. The nation stood at the threshold of a promised phase of constitutional development likely to transform her relationship with Britain. A handful of Europeans and Indians keenly interested in ending the strife between the Government and the Congress had, ever since the giddy days of the civil disobedience campaign of 1930, felt the need to get together and make a concerted effort to build a bridge of understanding and goodwill between the British Government and the people of India. There was, at the moment, no conflict of opinion concerning India's demand for Dominion status. The British commercial community and its chambers of commerce had declared themselves in favour of the proposed constitutional reform. All that they wanted was that they should be allowed to trade as before, without racial discrimination. The moment seemed opportune, therefore, for men of goodwill on either side to strive for a favourable atmosphere for the second session of the Round Table Conference. To this end a scheme was drawn up for an organization named the Welfare of India League, to consist of Indians and Europeans. Many prominent British statesmen enthusiastically welcomed this goodwill move, and heartened by their support the organizers of the movement arranged for the League to be inaugurated in Bombay on 23 July 1931, when the preparations for the second Round Table Conference were in full swing. The principal object of the League was to provide a common platform for those Europeans and Indians who stood for the speedy creation of a system of government which secured for India her proper place as an equal partner in the British Commonwealth of free nations. Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, one of the most outstanding figures in the commercial life of India, once a prominent member of the Central Legislature, was appointed President of the League. Another influential representative of the commercial community, G. M. Rose, became one of the Secretaries. It was arranged to maintain touch with the Government, the leaders of the Congress, and the various other political parties and communities, and to place the League's services at their disposal. At the outset its principal work in the field of politics was to assist the Indian

delegates at the Round Table Conference, to facilitate settlement of the problems arising out of its discussions, to remove misunderstandings wherever possible, and to offer suggestions for furthering the objects of the Conference. A London Committee was appointed, consisting of members of the League who were delegates to the Round Table Conference. H. S. L. Polak, Gandhi's friend from South Africa days, was the London representative, and the writer of this retrospect, one of the Secretaries, was also then in London. The most important question before the second session of the Conference was that of representation of the minorities in the future constitution. Unfortunately, on this issue the Indian delegates were unable to arrive at an understanding among themselves. The League's opinion was therefore conveyed to the Prime Minister to the effect that solution would be greatly facilitated if the British Government declared at once a resolution to grant India full responsible government subject to reasonable temporary safeguards. The League's opinion was based on the conviction that stimulated by such a declaration the Indian delegates would hasten to arrive at a compromise on the minorities question.

While Gandhi was considering whether he should attend the Conference, the bureaucracy generally was hoping against hope that he might be prevented by his followers from so doing. But he did go, bent on peace and full of hope that he would have a fair hearing. India was accorded the privilege of sending sixteen delegates, but he insisted on going alone as the sole accredited representative of the country. He had made up his mind that he alone should voice at the Conference the sentiments and demands of the Congress, which, he claimed, stood for the whole of India including the Indian states. It did not occur to him that such an attitude savoured of Caesarism; but so it seemed to many in England, giving the impression that while Congress held sway over India, Gandhi was the master of the Congress. At the sittings of the Conference the seasoned British statesmen soon took the measure of the fragile little man. He whom they had dreaded so much at a distance, they now saw was in fact not so powerful nor so dreadful. What

harm could come to the Empire from the opposition of so well-meaning and so chivalrous an opponent, whose sole weapon was non-violent non-co-operation? 'The dogs may bark, the caravan goes on.'

But whatever opinion some British delegates might have formed of Gandhi's capacity and strength to shake the fabric of their rule, the new Secretary of State for India had, from the very beginning of his acquaintance, no doubt that at the Conference he and his colleagues would have to deal with a man, who, despite what his opponents might say to the contrary, held the master keys to the success of the constitution that they were trying to write. Many of his Conservative friends and supporters, he says,¹ resented that Gandhi should have been invited to the Conference. The civil disobedience movement had undoubtedly undermined respect for law and order and had unintentionally encouraged riots and the murders of officials and policemen who were faithfully and loyally carrying out their duties. Was it surprising that British resentment was deep and bitter against the man who seemed to be mainly responsible for such violence, even though he disapproved of it? 'How was I to act,' says Templewood, 'in face of this widespread feeling? What should be my attitude to the man who was hated as fiercely as he was loved? How was I to obtain his invaluable help in the making of the Constitution without turning against me not only the Moslems and the Untouchables who regarded him with unconcealed suspicion, but the many Conservatives who still viewed with doubt and dislike the changes that I believed to be necessary for India?'

One thing was certain. Templewood would not stoop to obtain Gandhi's co-operation by false pretence. In what he had made up his mind to say to him there was to be no reservation or equivocation. He therefore told Gandhi as definitely as he could that he sincerely wished to see responsible government in India, that he could have a Bill passed that would make it possible, but that in view of British public opinion, Conservative anxieties in Parliament and, not least, communal fears in India, he could not promise Gandhi or anyone else immediate Dominion status.

¹ Templewood, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-8.

He went on to say that law and order must be maintained if there was to be any constitutional advance. Indeed, terrorism was as fatal to Indian aspirations as it was to British understanding. 'You may very well think,' he told Gandhi, 'that there is so great a gulf between your demand for immediate independence and my gradual approach to Dominion status that it is a waste of your time to go on talking to me. If you do, I shall perfectly understand, and certainly not regard it as discourteous if you do not visit me again to continue our conversation. If, however, you still think it is worth while, I am always ready and willing to see you, and I shall welcome further discussions within the framework that I have just described.' Gandhi cordially responded to this approach. He was relieved to find a Secretary of State who did not pretend to agree with him when in reality he did not. The transparent sincerity and candour on both sides convinced each of them that there was to be no make-believe. There was a series of very frank discussions between them, in Templewood's own words, 'the start of a friendship, shown by many letters, all of them written in a beautiful flowing hand, that continued until his tragic death'.

Gandhi's description of his first talk with the Secretary of State, as given to his friend, Miss Muriel Lester, vividly brings out how the two were brought so close: 'Sir Samuel said that he might appear to be a hard man, he might even be called in after years a bad man, but he would rather appear as hard and as black as anyone liked to declare, than that anyone should ever be able to say of him that he promised things that afterwards he failed to perform.' To which Gandhi replied: 'Ah, I can meet you, Sir Samuel, I shake hands with you over that. It's a point of unity between us, your truthfulness. Thank you.'¹

The great mistake Gandhi made was to go alone to the Conference. Without anyone by his side to give him information, advice or assistance with regard to the various administrative questions that came up for solution, his participation in the discussions was of little practical value. 'I am here,' he told the Conference, 'very respectfully to claim, on behalf of the Congress, complete control over the defence

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

forces and our foreign affairs.' If these were granted, he did not himself aspire to 'complete independence'. He had declared at the outset that he would 'count no sacrifice too great if by chance he could pull through an honourable settlement', but on these two demands he remained uncompromising.

At the outset Gandhi made three claims which were hotly contested by the other delegates, and by many of his own countrymen. Firstly he declared that the Congress alone represented political India; secondly that the Untouchables, being Hindus, could not be segregated from the main body of Hinduism; and thirdly that Hindus and Muslims could and should live together in a united India without separate electorates or special safeguards for minorities. Dr Ambedkar, representing the depressed classes, on the other hand insisted that the millions of Untouchables needed separate constituencies and rigid protection. The communal question thus dominated all the discussions. The hostile elements in the Conservative Party made capital out of this fundamental breach in the plan of all-India federation. If the proposed reforms could not be put through without communal agreement, why should they not be postponed until Indians became united in what they really wanted the British Government to do? Churchill did his best to press upon the Secretary of State the case for provincial autonomy without any change at the Centre. Templewood felt, however, that to postpone responsible government at the Centre until the communal controversy was settled was tantamount to saying that self-government was permanently impracticable. He therefore told Churchill it was not possible to hold up responsibility at the Centre. Churchill could not be thus put off. He tried, as we shall see, to sabotage the scheme for federation by the imposition of safeguards.

On the question of separate representation for the depressed classes, the Untouchables, the British public awaited Gandhi's constructive proposals. With deep sorrow and deeper humiliation Gandhi admitted his utter failure to secure an agreed solution. It was, moreover, a matter for humiliation not merely for him but for all the Indian delegates. The Secretary of State felt that if the Conference was to

continue, the British Government had to intervene. MacDonald as Premier at first wished to avoid the hornet's nest of communal wrangles, but was persuaded by the Secretary of State to make a statement in which he undertook that the British Government would give a decision on the question of communal electorates if the communities failed to agree among themselves. The decision, it was feared, would cause discontent, but it was the only alternative to a breakdown of the discussions. This considerate attitude should have protected the British Government from the charge later levelled against it of pursuing the policy of *divide et impera*. Far from it, they decided, as Templewood testifies, to build at great risk a bridge over which they hoped to bring Indians together and make possible a British withdrawal. The generous tribute paid to the British Government by Gandhi himself, on his return to India, shows that although his mission in London had failed he found the Secretary of State to be 'an honest and frank-hearted Englishman'. 'We parted,' he said, 'as the best of friends, as I did with all the other Ministers.'

On 28 December 1931, Gandhi returned to India empty-handed. The mission had been a grievous failure. The splendid opportunity of formulating a scheme for shortening the period of transition to Dominion status and of securing the confidence of the Muslims and other minorities, had been lost. Was he alone to blame? Going to the Conference without capable colleagues, he had crippled himself and had failed to make any solid contribution to the solution of India's problems. But surely there had been other factors militating against the success of the Conference? The diehards on both sides had been doing their worst to wreck the Gandhi-Irwin pact and torpedo the Conference; they had wanted a pitched battle and, unfortunately, they had their way. By the time Gandhi returned to India, the situation had worsened. A 'no-rent' campaign had been set on foot by the Congress in the United Provinces. Trouble had broken out on the North-West Frontier with the militant Red Shirts, who were Gandhi's chief Muslim supporters. There had been terrorist murders in Bengal, forcing the authorities to act as law and order had to be maintained. The

Government resorted to the old ordinances under which suspects could be summarily arrested and detained. By the time Gandhi reached Bombay, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the leader of the Red Shirts, and Nehru were in confinement.

On the day he landed Gandhi addressed a meeting of the Welfare of India League. The League had hoped to greet him as the saviour who had brought swaraj nearer to India; but that evening its members gathered together to hear from his lips the doleful story of a frustrated mission. He had pledged himself, he said, to many British friends that despite the disappointing result of the Conference he would explore all avenues of co-operation. This determination he had repeated to the writer of this account on board the steamer during the voyage to Bombay and had added that he was at the moment in communication with the Secretary of State, to see how he could still continue his co-operation. What, however, did he find on his arrival? 'I find myself in impenetrable darkness,' said he, to the members of the League. 'The grim reality with which I find myself face to face is an ordinance for which there is no parallel whatsoever, an inhuman piece of legislation, if it can be called by the name of legislation.' For the penalty for defying the order against agrarian agitation was bullets. Except in cases where defiance was violent, this penalty was not justified. Nehru had left his home in Allahabad and was on his way to Bombay to meet Gandhi when he was arrested.

Some of the Europeans present at the meeting asked whether Gandhi could hold out the hope of co-operation if the ordinance objected to could be withdrawn. 'That,' said he, 'would certainly remove an obstacle in the way and render the atmosphere more favourable.' 'Could you not visit the Frontier Provinces and meet officials before you condemn the ordinance?' was another question. 'May I tell you,' observed Gandhi, 'that I tried thrice last year to visit the Frontier Province and failed? After the truce I asked Lord Irwin if I might do so. I wanted to co-operate fully and so I would like to have not only his permission but encouragement. But he said, "No." Then I pleaded with Lord Willingdon twice, but again failed. Lord Irwin felt that my presence would create a ferment. Lord Willingdon

felt very much the same. If you like, I shall try it a fourth time, but if any of you have the ear of the Government, I would ask you to be my attorneys and obtain the Government's permission. I do not like to commit civil disobedience, if I am ordered not to go, and start it at the wrong end. I would start it at the right end and put the Government in the wrong.'

'But how would you deal with seditious organizations, subversive of law and order?' asked another member of the League. 'Sedition is an elastic term,' replied Gandhi. 'Even if you mean by "subversive" organizations those wanting to usurp the power of government, they should not be dealt with by ordinances. Do you know the Government is fast estranging even its supporters by these ordinances? They may verbally say, "Yes, yes," but they really mean, "No, No." You want me to think of Bengal and say what I want to do to stop assassinations. No society should tolerate assassinations, I admit. That does not mean that all suspects are to be treated as assassins? Why are there assassinations in Bengal and in other provinces? I will go to the root cause of the disease. Two mad girls killed an innocent magistrate. They had drunk deep of the poison of hate and were given to exaggeration, but beneath it all there was a substratum of truth which would dement not only unsophisticated girls in Bengal but also anyone in any province. I yield to no Englishman in condemning violence. I will go with Englishmen any length to stamp it out by humane methods, but never in the manner of General Dyer. Do you expect to hammer out a constitution in this atmosphere of ordinances? It is a forlorn hope, it does not redound to the credit of Englishmen to rule by ordinances nor to the credit of Indians to be ruled by them.'

At the conclusion of the speech (it was midnight), he added: 'I landed in the hope that I should find out ways and means of tendering co-operation, but when I find that at every step there is a huge boulder, what am I to do? I am dying to find ways and means, but see not a ray of hope. In a state such as the present, people believing in violence would rise up in open rebellion, but what are people pledged to non-violence to do? Their only remedy is non-violent disobedience. I want every

Englishman and Englishwoman to search their hearts in these days of Christmas.'

Carrying on his feeble shoulders an overwhelming burden of responsibility for the peace of a vast sub-continent, Gandhi wrote a letter to Lord Willingdon, who had succeeded Lord Irwin as Viceroy of India, seeking an interview to obtain his advice and guidance in the most difficult predicament in which he found himself. The correspondence which ensued proved abortive. The issue debated was : Who sabotaged the Gandhi-Irwin pact? 'Not I,' said Gandhi. 'Not I,' protested the Viceroy. If Gandhi was prepared to disown what the Congress had done during his absence in London, the Viceroy would grant him an interview, but he would not allow any discussion on the ordinances.

The trouble was that each side distrusted and feared the other. The extremists assumed that Gandhi's mission to London would fail. Even before his departure, the enraged section of officialdom was chafing under 'Padre' Irwin's quixotic peace move. The writer heard with dismay the echo of its voice in Delhi and in Simla. Many of the Congress followers felt impelled to revolt against the idealism of their over-optimistic leader, and only reluctantly acquiesced in his decision to participate in the work of the London Conference. While he was there, both sides prepared for the anticipated renewal of the conflict. The disclosure of certain secret communiqués emanating from the office of district collectors and commissioners makes it apparent that, even before he embarked on his voyage, the truce was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Under cover of rent collection and the enforcement of law and order, the chain of repression was tightened from Peshawar to Bengal. One of the official circulars, dated 1 July 1931, states : 'As it appears to be possible, if not probable, that the Congress will start active civil disobedience, District Magistrates in consultation with D.S.P.s (District Superintendents of Police) are requested to collect information concerning Provincial Congress Committees and their activities such as salt and forest satyagraha, incitements to ryots not to pay land revenue, intimidation

of Government servants, boycott of British goods, the names of Congress volunteers and agitators and such other information as would be useful in the event of direct action being resumed by the Congress.' Draft ordinances to be issued in case of need were kept ready while the Conference was in session. One of these was sent by a prominent Congressman to Gandhi in London. There could have been no objection to normal precautionary measures : what actually provoked the conflict and open declaration of civil disobedience was the action taken to revise and extend repressive ordinances while Gandhi was still in London. The Bengal criminal law ordinances were extended to practically the whole of India. Anyone could be arrested on the mere suspicion of endangering public peace, and the police and military authorities were given power to commandeer and confiscate property and to restrict liberty of movement. The renewal of the Emergency Press Act made it impossible to publish news of the Government's high-handed action. Despite Gandhi's pleadings and his assurances that he would review the situation with an open mind, despite deputations from the Welfare of India League, the chambers of commerce and the political organizations to the Governor of Bombay, despite telegrams to the Viceroy urging him to avert the crisis by granting him an interview, Gandhi was spirited away, within a week of his arrival, to Yeravada jail, Poona. Not knowing that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had also been arrested, Gandhi issued through him the following message to the people :

Infinite is God's mercy. Please tell the people never to swerve from truth and non-violence, never to flinch, to give their life and all to win swaraj.

To Englishmen he gave another message through Verrier Elwin, the young Oxford graduate and protagonist of the Congress cause :

Tell your countrymen that I love them even as I love my own countrymen. I have never done anything towards them in hatred or malice and, God willing, I shall never do anything in that manner in future. I am acting not differently from what I have done under similar circumstances towards my own kith and kin.

The lion was laid low. He had erred in couching his communications to Lord Willingdon in language which could be construed as connivance with the provocative acts of his followers and a threat of resumption of civil disobedience, thus giving the authorities the excuse they wanted to clap him into jail. But this error could hardly justify the autocratic attitude and action of the Viceroy, in view of the certainty that it would precipitate a grave crisis. Here was a government pledged to give self-government to the people and to lead them along the path of progressive political responsibility. Confronting it, there was the leader of the non-violent civil disobedience campaign designed to hasten the process of reform. This leader, idolized by the people, persuaded by the previous Viceroy to co-operate with the Government and to participate in the proceedings of the Round Table Conference, suspended civil disobedience, was released from jail and went to London. He co-operated throughout the session of the Conference, promised the Secretary of State that on return to India he would do what he could to continue co-operation, repeated this assurance in India, and requested the new Viceroy to grant him an interview. The reply in effect was: 'Back you go to jail unless you disown your colleagues and all that has taken place during your absence, even though you may not have been a party to it'!

Lord Willingdon was prepared to face the consequences of his action. Dyarchy ended in anarchy; instead of the rule of law, there was the rule of the ordinance, the rule of the *lathi*, intensifying instead of suppressing the people's defiance of unjust laws. New offences were created, some of them so puerile as to bring His Majesty's government in India into contempt. It was obvious that the rulers were determined to see the Congress crushed, for then only would the people realize that the reforms to follow the Round Table Conference were conceded by the Government and not wrung from it by the Congress.

'If I were writing the history of this period, how could I justify the action of Lord Willingdon?' In answer to this question which the writer put to the Home Member of the day, Sir James Crerar, he replied: 'What you tell me about Gandhi's intentions and endeavour to continue his co-operation, I accept.

But his followers would never have allowed him to have his way. There would have been a breach of peace all the same.' He added that the Government was determined to go ahead with the work of the Conference and its committees, and that he believed all would be well after the reforms were announced. Another British member of the Indian Civil Service, in charge of the Home Department of one of the larger provinces, when confronted by the writer with the same question, put his hand on the questioner's shoulder and said very frankly: 'Don't worry. It (meaning the arrest of Gandhi) had to be done some day. Before the prisoners are released, the Government will themselves announce reforms in the Constitution.'

The Viceroy, the governors and the members of the Civil Service, with the exception of a few to whom it was really galling to have to carry out repressive measures, in hoping to put down the Congress and then to reconcile its members in due course to the policy of reforms seemed to have read history to little purpose. They forgot that the revolt of a national organization fighting for freedom might be crushed, but not its spirit. The Congress was being crushed; its spirit nevertheless prevailed. Those who previously had misgivings about Congress policy and had kept aloof, now swelled the lists of its supporters and were at one with the national leaders in their determination to offer stubborn resistance to the ordinances. The splendid efforts to inspire confidence and end the deadlock thus failed. Bitterness grew on both sides and the strife became intensified. The tragedy was of missed opportunity and of error heaped upon error.

Rebels in Office

THE bureaucrats in both Britain and India confidently expected the collapse of the Congress to result from the firm policy pursued to suppress and outlaw it. They soon discovered that they were living in a fool's paradise. The firm policy proved infirm in putting down the Congress agitation for freedom and was abandoned in favour of a truce sagaciously brought about by the new Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow. Under the terms of this truce, civil disobedience was suspended, the Congress rebels abandoned the boycott of councils, contested the elections in 1937, gained sweeping majorities in 8 out of 11 provinces and were installed in the seats of the mighty. For the first time in the history of the country Congress ministries began functioning. The sudden change in the political scene is an interesting illustration of the triumph of nationalism.

The response of the people to the call of the Working Committee of the Congress to defy the ordinances and prohibitory orders exceeded all expectations. In defiance of the ordinances meetings were held and processions were taken out, foreign cloth shops were picketed, Congress bulletins, issued by zealous youths who had gone underground, were distributed in thousands, and hartals were observed in protest against the arrest of political leaders. In some districts peasants were called upon to refuse to pay land tax to the Government; other offences committed with a view to courting arrest included the illicit manufacture and sale of salt and making bonfires of foreign cloth in public places.

Despite the disturbed condition of the country, the Government religiously pursued its twin policies of suppression of revolt and terrorism on the one hand, and reconciliation and constitutional reforms on the other. The Conference committees on the Franchise, on Federal Finance and on the Indian States,

visited India and drafted their reports during the year 1932. In August, the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, announced that the British Government had adopted a provisional scheme for communal representation. This scheme afterwards came to be known as the Communal Award, but the word 'Award' was a misnomer. An Award presupposes arbitration voluntarily resorted to by free and equal parties, and in this case there was no voluntary submission of the dispute to the Premier or to anyone else by the parties concerned. Be that as it may, the British Government, having taken on its own shoulders the responsibility of giving a decision in a matter on which the delegates to the Conference could not themselves agree, proclaimed the separation of the population of India into watertight compartments on the basis of religion. Separate electorates were retained for the minority communities and for the Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab, notwithstanding their numerical majority in those provinces. In the provinces in which they were in a minority, weightage was continued. The depressed classes were now recognized as a minority community entitled to a separate electorate. In addition to the creation of specially reserved constituencies, the Award gave them the right to contest seats in the general constituencies.

The terms of the Award confirmed Gandhi's worst fears. On the day following the announcement he wrote to MacDonald from prison to say that he would resist it with his life. 'The only way I can do so, is by declaring a perpetual fast unto death.' For him, he declared, the matter was a religious one. Rightly or wrongly, he honestly believed that acceptance of the Award would lead to the disruption of Hindu society and, what was worse, undermine the foundations of the spiritual unity of the people. The Prime Minister of England could hardly be expected to have the knowledge of the religious aspect of the problem possessed by one whose self-imposed mission it was to spiritualize politics and rear a society pledged to specific religious principles and spiritual truths. To MacDonald, therefore, Gandhi's objections were quite unexpected, for the Award appeared to him the shortest way out of the tangle. On the morning of 20 September Gandhi said his morning prayer and took

his last meal, which consisted of lemon juice and honey with water. When the clock struck twelve, the zero hour dreaded by his admirers all over the world, the historic fast commenced.

In England and in non-Congress political circles in India the fast was regarded by many as political blackmail; but the voice of such critics was drowned in the chorus of sympathy and the prayers of people of all shades of religious thought and political conviction. They demanded that a concerted, countrywide effort should be made to find ways and means of meeting Gandhi's objections to the Award and of saving his life. It was not easy for the various groups with their divergent views to come to a solution acceptable to him. A provisional agreement between all parties, which came to be known as the Poona Pact, was therefore ratified at a conference held in Bombay on 25 September. Responding readily to the demand for immediate action to enable Gandhi to break his fast, the authorities sent the Inspector-General of Prisons to him with a document expressing acquiescence in the Award being replaced by corresponding provisions of the Poona Pact.

On Monday, 26 September, a unique ceremony was performed in Yeravada jail. In his cot lay the fasting fakir, majestic in his modesty and simplicity, surrounded by about two hundred devoted followers and friends. The poet Tagore led a prayer with a Bengali song, then followed recitations of Sanskrit verses and Gandhi's favourite hymn, 'Vaishnava Jana'. Kasturba then handed her husband a glass of orange juice. The fast was ended, and for reasons of health Gandhi was soon released. From 27 September to 2 October, 'Untouchability Abolition Week' was observed throughout the country. Inter-caste meetings and dinners were held in the cities, and temples and wells were thrown open to the Untouchables. An all-India Anti-Untouchability League was set up, with a network of provincial boards. For many months Gandhi with some of his followers concentrated on propaganda for the elimination of Untouchability and constructive work for the depressed classes.

The third session of the Round Table Conference, the last, shortest and the least enthusiastic, opened in November 1932. Mainly concerned with affirming the decisions already taken

concerning the outlines of the proposed constitution, it accepted the composition of the Central Legislature—the upper house to be elected on a provincial and the lower on a national basis. The main structure stood, but faith in its stability was lacking; the Liberals were enthusiastic but the Congress was still intransigent. The princes' ardour for federation was not the same as at the first session. The British Government, too, was half-hearted.

In the spring of 1933, the proposals adopted by the British Government in the light of the proceedings of the Conference, were embodied in a White Paper and referred to a joint select committee of both the Houses of Parliament. Lord Linlithgow was appointed chairman of the committee. It took eighteen months before its report was out, and meanwhile the proposals were under fire throughout India. Gandhi was engrossed in constructive work. It was suggested to him in September 1934 by some Congress colleagues—and he agreed with them—that the time had arrived for him to retire from the Congress. Others whom he consulted, however, demurred. He therefore postponed the final step until the October session of the Congress. On 28 October, the last day of the session, he entered the pandal to sever his official connexion with the national organization. The Congress recorded its confidence in his leadership; it would have liked him to reconsider his decision but as all efforts to persuade him to do so had failed, it reluctantly accepted his resignation.

The leadership of the Congress then passed to Nehru, the leader of its left wing. He was elected President in 1936 and 1937, and he frankly advocated the doctrine of revolutionary nationalism. 'The time might come,' he said, anticipating the crisis in Europe with the prescience of a close student of international problems, 'and that sooner perhaps than we expect, when we might be put to the test. Let us get ready for that test. . . . If war comes or any other great crisis, India's attitude will make a difference. We hold the keys of success in our hands, if we but turn them rightly.'

After prolonged deliberation the Linlithgow Committee reported broadly in favour of the Government's proposals. At the end of 1934, a Bill embodying its findings was vehemently

opposed by the right-wing Conservatives led by Churchill in the Commons and by Salisbury in the Lords, and underwent drastic changes to satisfy the Tories. The principal proposals as finally adopted and embodied in the Act were :

1. The creation of two new provinces — Sind and Orissa.

2. The provinces should have full responsible government of the parliamentary type. There was, however, a fly in the ointment. The Government was instructed to accept the recommendations of the ministers, but in respect of what were called its special responsibilities, such as the prevention of any grave menace to the peace or tranquillity of a province and the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of minorities, it was to exercise its individual judgement. It was, besides, invested with power to take over the administration of a province in case of a breakdown.

3. The franchise was extended to 30 million voters, and communal representation in the legislatures was adopted on the lines of the Communal Award as modified by the Poona Pact.

4. At the Centre a federal government was to be set up, consisting of representatives of British India and the states. The legislature to consist of two houses, a legislative assembly and a council of state. But the federal provisions were not to come into force until 50 per cent of the princes had signed the instrument of accession.

5. The Governor-General in Council was to be responsible for the portfolios of Defence and Foreign Affairs ; the other portfolios to be held by ministers responsible to the legislature. As regards finance, however, there were certain reservations. Special powers similar to those of the governors were vested in the Governor-General.

Thus was dyarchy abandoned in the provinces, and introduced at the Centre. As originally proposed, the reforms were the result of much constructive political thought, and their main features had considerable backing in India. The subsequent reservations, or safeguards, with which the whole scheme was riddled through and through, reflected the stiffening of the opinion of the British Parliament towards Indian matters, this being now predominantly Conservative. The caution with which proposals for constitutional reform had previously been met seemed on this occasion needlessly restrictive. After seventy-five years of cogitation and legislation the British still hesitated to

go courageously forward. India was offered a constitution which appeared to the leaders of political thought to be the negation of responsible government. The real quantum of power transferred was so insignificant, compared with the wide power still remaining with the British Government and its representatives in India, that its critics could hardly be blamed for regarding the new constitution as a mockery of democracy.

In his memoirs Lord Halifax deplores the persistence of the critics of the proposed reforms, of whom Churchill was the most formidable, in stressing the dangers inherent in the steps that Parliament was asked to take and the necessity of establishing safeguards. 'For these' (safeguards), he observes, 'a perfectly good case could be made, but they were pushed out of scale in the public eye of India by the place they were made to fill in the parliamentary debates.'¹ The natural result was, he points out, to rob the constitutional proposals of much of their first attraction. The inordinate delay during the passage of the Bill, consequent upon the diehard opposition in Parliament, was unfortunate. 'Seldom,' says Lord Halifax, 'can a small minority have been able to affect more powerfully, and, as I am bound to think, more unfortunately, the fate of a great constitutional enterprise. . . . But for that it might have been possible . . . to get Federation at least partially established before the war came, when inevitably new considerations took precedence and the opportunity receded.' For India as a whole, the failure of the federation plan was certainly a disaster, for the plan having come to nothing, partition seemed to be the only alternative in view of the deadly antagonism persisting between Muslims and Hindus.

To realize how harmful the conservatism of the day was, compared with that of the nineteenth century, it is helpful to recall a few landmarks in the constitutional progress of the country under the British régime. When the Legislative Council of the Governor-General was first established in 1834, it was a very small, exclusively official body. With the Indian Councils Act of 1861, the process of constitutional development began. It enlarged the Council somewhat by the inclusion of a few

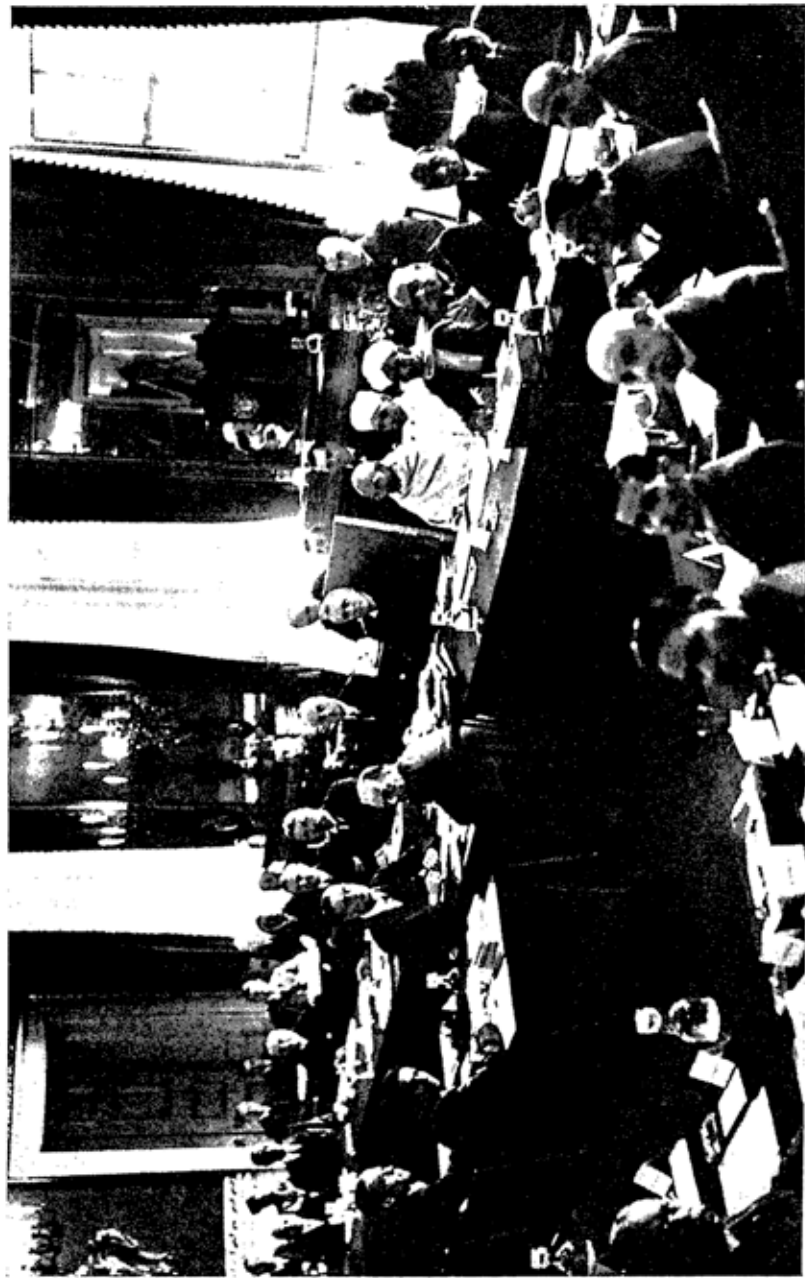
¹ *op. cit.*, p. 125.

non-official members nominated by the Governor-General. The provincial councils brought into being under this Act were also predominantly official. Soon after, the political organizations of the day demanded expansion and reform of the legislatures with elected members. This was the first plank in the platform of the National Congress when it was founded in 1885. The result of the agitation then started (and supported by the British friends of the Congress such as Bradlaugh, who actually introduced a Bill on the lines of the Congress demand), was the Indian Councils Act of 1892. This Act introduced for the first time the principle of election; but the elected members were in fact the nominees of the Governor, or of the Governor-General, on the recommendation of electorates created for the purpose. The Morley-Minto reforms led to the enlargement of the central and provincial councils with a substantial portion of elected members, but the elections were still indirect except in Madras, and the provisions of the Act for setting up separate council electorates vitiated the entire scheme of reform. Then followed the days of the 1914-18 war, days of widely preached self-determination when, to quote the British Premier, Lloyd George, the world was rushing along at a giddy pace, 'covering the track of centuries in a year'. If these words were applicable to any country more than another, it was India. Sagacious British statesmen took note of it in good time, and the progressive realization of responsible government was the keynote of the Act of 1919. This Act marked a revolutionary change in the British concept of the destiny of political India, which hitherto had ruled out the possibility of the Hindu traditional organization of society ever reconciling itself with modern democracy. It had been made possible by the beginnings of Indian political unity resulting from forces such as the English language and the more liberal aspects of government policy in the previous century. The Government was able to place before itself and the country, in modification of the traditional policy, a new objective in the progressive realization of responsible government in India. Had the conditions then prevailing enabled both sides to work the Act's somewhat cumbrous machinery, all would have been well for India and her relationship

with Britain. As it was, however, it synchronized with the non-co-operation movement, and its success was marred from the beginning. The civil disobedience campaigns ended in the triumph of soul-force over physical force, and dyarchy ended, as we have seen, practically in anarchy. Once more an earnest attempt was made to satisfy Indian public opinion and to resolve the deadlock. The spirit of 1917-19 again animated the British Government's proposals for provincial autonomy and a bicameral federal legislature. But the British Conservatives erred grievously in whittling down the proposed reforms. The scheme of reform, as embodied in the Act of 1935, gave the impression even in pro-British circles in India that the reactionaries had succeeded in putting off indefinitely the day for the transfer of power to the people.

If not the lesson of history, at least the experience of struggle and revolt in their own day, should have served as a danger signal to the British statesmen. There was also evidence of a decline in their power and prestige, in their continued capacity to govern empires. Since it was not their intention to cling to power for ever, this was the right moment to remove the suspicion that they were trying to maintain their hold on the Indian empire for as long as they could. If their policy had been to retain the empire and suppress rebellion at all cost, one could have understood; but they had already embarked voluntarily on the gradual abandonment of power, and so to pursue a policy which perpetuated distrust, discontent and disorder and which increasingly antagonized those who would gain and wield power at no distant date, and meanwhile to cherish hopes that free India would decide to remain within the British commonwealth of nations, seemed altogether futile and absurd. The policy of repression and the incarceration of leaders had failed. Those who wished to persist knew that it must fail over and over again. They knew that withdrawal of power was inevitable, yet they did not see the wisdom of withdrawing in good time with the goodwill which voluntary abandonment would engender.

When King George V came to India as Prince of Wales in the year 1905, he asked Gopal Krishna Gokhale, then on the threshold of his political career, whether the Indian people



The Second Session of the Round Table Conference, 1931. Lord Sankey, the Lord Chancellor, is in the chair; on his right, Sir Samuel Hoare and (at the end of the table) Sir John Simon; on his left, Gandhi, Malaviya, Sastri; Sapru, Jayakar and Ramaswami Mudaliar. Ambedkar, wearing glasses, is on the near side of the table.

wished the British régime in India to continue. The thoughtful man, careful of every word he uttered, replied: 'If a plebiscite had been taken, twenty years ago, whether the people wanted the British rule to continue, they would have answered almost to a man, "Yes, certainly!" Today, however, large numbers would say they were indifferent.' Had any member of the Royal Family put the same question thirty years later to the veteran Liberal leader, Chimanlal Setalvad, driven to despair by the latest act of surrender to the diehards he would have answered with equal candour: 'A large section of the population would now vote for the severance of the British connexion,' so completely was faith in British justice shattered during the interval! The bureaucracy had made many mistakes and miscalculations before, but no blunder seemed so tragic in its implications as that committed in handling the political situation between the years 1931 and 1935. It deprived Britain of all the glory that would have been hers had she at that psychological moment gracefully provided for responsible government within a short specified period, instead of, as contemplated by the Act of 1935, at an unpredictable date.

The Congress rejected the Act root and branch. At its 1934 session it had declared that the only satisfactory alternative to the existing arrangement would be a constitution drawn up on a basis of adult suffrage or 'as near it as possible'. Nehru called the new Act 'a new charter of slavery'. In condemning the Act the Congress did not stand alone: the general public, including the Liberals, were just as disappointed, particularly as the financial reservations were needlessly strict. Instead of rejecting the proposals, however, the Liberals thought it better to accept what they could get and agitate for more. The Muslims, too, acquiesced, because they felt that their rights as an influential minority would be sufficiently secured by the continuance of separate electorates, of weightage, and by the neutralizing influence which the representatives of the states were expected to exert at the Centre.

Nehru was in favour of boycotting the elections. 'It would be a fatal error,' he said, 'for the Congress to accept office. That would inevitably involve co-operation with British imperialism.'

The left wing was with him, but several leading constitutionally-minded Congressmen were of the opinion that it was desirable to get, if possible, control of the provincial administration, particularly because being in office they would be able to introduce, forthwith, schemes of social betterment long overdue. While, therefore, the Congress election manifesto accepted the view put forward by Nehru that the purpose of entering the provincial legislatures was not to co-operate in any way with the Government in working the Act but to control it and seek the end of it, the Congress postponed any decision on the question of acceptance of office until after the elections.

The electoral manifesto of the Muslim League, drafted under Jinnah's direction, differed on no vital point from that of the Congress. It condemned the federal part of the Act altogether, but although criticizing the provincial part, it declared that it ought to be worked for what it was worth. It sought at the same time to revive the Congress-League pact of 1916 as 'one of the greatest beacon-lights in the constitutional history of India and as a signal proof of the identity of purpose, earnestness and co-operation between the two great sections of the people of India'.

The result of the 1937 provincial elections was a great victory for the Congress, greater even than its leaders had expected. Out of 1,585 seats in all the provincial lower houses taken together, it won 711. Six of the seven provinces in which it got a clear majority or proved the strongest party were Hindu-majority provinces. The seventh was the North-West Frontier Province, where the militant Red Shirt section of the overwhelming Muslim majority had identified itself with the Congress party. In the remaining three provinces the Muslims were also in a majority; but there was no such cohesion in the political organization in those provinces as in the Congress camp.

In February 1937, the All-India Congress Committee adopted a resolution declaring that the Indian people had by their votes given overwhelming proof that, in agreement with the Congress, they rejected the Act of 1935 and desired to frame their own constitution by means of a constituent assembly. Howsoever exaggerated the claim might have been, considering the fact

that only 54 per cent of the electorate had voted and that the voting reflected the voice of only British India, the Committee demanded 'on behalf of the people of India' that the new constitution be withdrawn. Meanwhile the Congress members of the legislatures were asked to conform to the policy of combating the Act, a policy which 'must inevitably lead to deadlocks with the British Government and bring out still further the inherent antagonism between British imperialism and Indian nationalism'.

At a meeting of the Committee held in March 1937, it was decided by a majority that Congress ministries might be formed, provided that they obtained assurances that the governors would not exercise their special powers to override the ministers of their provinces in regard to their constitutional activities. The author of this beautifully vague proviso was Mahatma Gandhi. He explained that it was not his desire to lay down any impossible condition. 'Have I not heard,' he asked, 'Sir Samuel Hoare and other ministers saying that ordinarily governors would not use their admittedly large powers of interference? I claim that the Congress formula has asked for nothing more.' On 1 April the Act came into operation. The governors of the provinces in which the Congress had obtained majorities invited their leaders to form governments. The Congress leaders asked for an undertaking in terms of the All-India Congress Committee's mandate, knowing that such an undertaking could not be given as no one except Parliament had the right to suspend any provision of a parliamentary enactment. When the governors confirmed that they could not promise to refrain from doing what in certain circumstances they were required by the Act to do, the Congress leaders declined to accept office. The governors thereupon appointed leaders of the minority parties to fill the breach. This was merely postponing the crisis, for under the statutory provisions the legislatures had to be summoned within six months, when the ministers would be opposed by hostile Congress majorities. That crisis was, however, averted, partly because the Secretary of State, the Governor-General and the governors were anxious that the Act should not remain a dead letter and partly because a large number of Congress leaders

took the realistic view that there was no likelihood of interference from governors in the day-to-day administration of the provinces. Lord Linlithgow issued a message on 21 June appealing to the people to count on him 'to strive untiringly for the full and final establishment in India of the principles of parliamentary government'. Without surrendering the ground, he succeeded in conciliating the Congress leaders by giving an authoritative interpretation of the intentions of the Government of India. On 7 July, after protracted discussion, the Working Committee took the fateful decision permitting Congressmen to accept office. It was reported in the press that the decision was unanimous but it was in fact arrived at in the face of three powerful members' dissent: Nehru the President of the Congress, Narendra Deva and Achyut Patwardhan.

The interim ministries resigned, and for the first time in the history of British India Congress ministries began to function. The legislatures met early in the autumn, and during the next two and a half years the fear of interference from the governors was dispelled. Except in rare cases the constitutional machinery ran smoothly; the governors' power to legislate by ordinance was never used. In the sphere of law and order, however, the régime of the Congress ministers had to pass through a severe test. Having themselves advocated civil disobedience, and many of them having suffered jail sentences, the ministers felt constrained to demonstrate their opposition to the policy of repression followed under the British régime. Political prisoners were released, bans on illegal associations and political activities were lifted, and securities taken from anti-British newspapers were returned. But often enough they found themselves face to face with the hard realities of day-to-day cases of disorder and defiance of the law.

On the whole, the experiment worked satisfactorily. The relations between ministers and governors were marked by courtesy, friendliness and helpfulness. Instead of pursuing a policy of wrecking the constitution, the ministers were seeking 'to expand the bounds of the constitution by constitutional pressure from within rather than by assault from without and in the meanwhile to strengthen the Congress hold on the masses by

ameliorative legislation in the way of tenancy laws, measures for debt redemption, Prohibition and labour legislation'.¹ Although two and a half years was too short a period for the ministries to touch India's grim problems of poverty and ignorance, their achievements constituted a record of which the Congress could well be proud. Few of its leaders on the Working Committee had participated in the election campaign, and the ministries were therefore formed principally of second-line leaders. Even so, they had shown that Congressmen could act as well as talk, administer as well as agitate, and their record was judged favourably even by unfriendly critics. It was a salutary experience.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939; and the viceregal declaration that India was also at war with Germany, brought about an unforeseen change in the political scene. It was the declared policy of the Congress to resist the use of India's men, money and resources in Britain's wars. Only a free nation could fight those who violated the freedom of others. It was galling to Indian leaders generally, not only to Congress, that India should be proclaimed a belligerent without the consent of the people's representatives in the assemblies. Rajagopalachari, the Premier of Madras, protested strongly against such treatment. No less was the resentment of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Premier of the United Provinces. 'Is our position no better,' he asked, 'than that of a vassal or of a serf or a galley slave, whose life is at the disposal of his master?' As foreign policy, which included the right to declare war with Germany, fell within the purview of the Viceroy's responsibilities and prerogatives, the declaration was technically in order. Administratively, however, it was unwise, politically erroneous, strategically unsound: in fact, from the point of view of the danger involved in offending the Congress and losing its support to the war effort, positively disastrous. It was rightly claimed that courtesy demanded consultation both with the provincial governments and with the country's representative body, the Central Assembly.

¹ C. Y. Chintamani & M. R. Masani : *India's Constitution at Work*, p. 131.

The Congress called upon the British Government to declare its war aims, to assure India's independence at the end of the war, and in the meanwhile to transfer power at the Centre to popular control. The Viceroy invited the leaders of all parties to meet him for a full and free discussion, and explained that it was not an opportune time to press the claim for India's freedom. The Congress leaders, however, insisted that they must see India in the picture of the world freedom envisaged by the Allies. As the negotiations proved unfruitful, the Congress ministers were called upon to resign. Thus the provincial ministries, after twenty-seven months of power, submitted their resignations on a constitutional issue which was primarily all-Indian and only indirectly provincial. It was a grave error, a tactical blunder, abruptly terminating one of the most promising experiments in responsive co-operation known to history. By pulling out its provincial ministries on its own initiative and flinging itself once more into the wilderness the Congress weakened its bargaining power. Had it left it to the British Government to find ways and means of arriving at a peaceful solution the history of India might have taken a different turn.

What could the governors do in the circumstances? The reappointment of minority ministries in the Congress provinces was plainly impracticable. Application of Section 93 of the Act of 1935, which provided that if the government of a province could not be carried on in accordance with the Act the governor could assume all the powers of government by proclamation, was inevitable. The Congress provinces thus became, in popular parlance, 'governors' provinces', a throwback to autocracy, which was to lead once more to anarchy. The procedure actually followed by the governors is briefly described in *India's Constitution at Work*.¹ Madras was the province in which the resignations were first accepted. Having invited the leader of the opposition to form an alternative Cabinet and having failed in the attempt, the Governor of Madras had no choice left but to suspend the working of the Constitution. This he did by proclamation on 30 October 1939, declaring that he had assumed to himself all powers vested in the provincial legisla-

¹ p. 158.

ture. Three members of the Indian Civil Service were appointed to act as his advisers. The same procedure was in turn gone through in other provinces, leaving 'provincial autonomy' in its truncated form functioning in the Punjab, Bengal and Sind.

On the Warpath Once More

IN VIEW of the world-wide crisis, the sudden constitutional deadlock in India was a disaster not only for India but also for Britain and her allies. Both the Viceroy and Gandhi wished to see the deadlock loosened, even if it could not be broken, and there were several interviews between the two. The Viceroy then interviewed Dr Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad, other Congress leaders, and Jinnah, but without result. Suddenly, however, the course of the war took a dramatic turn. Norway and Denmark were overrun by Hitler; Holland and Belgium surrendered; France was in imminent danger of collapse; the British expeditionary forces had to retreat from Dunkirk. The tragedy of Dunkirk seemed to spell extinction for Britain, and the peril in which she stood brought the war nearer India. It had been assumed by the Indian leaders that, as before, their country would be protected by British sea-power: now, however, it seemed that there was nothing to prevent Hitler's armies from occupying Egypt and descending thence on India, as Napoleon had once planned. How imminent the danger was could be gathered from the enactment hurriedly passed by the British Parliament, vesting in the Governor-General additional powers to be exercised in the event of complete breakdown of communications with the United Kingdom.

If ever it was necessary to overcome pacifist scruples, it was at this critical moment, when the freedom of the peoples of the world was in jeopardy. Should India stand aloof from such a crisis because of her differences with Britain on questions of constitutional advance? Should she forget the honourable part played in defence of freedom by her sons on other occasions, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, or Gandhi himself, during the Boer War and the war of 1914-18? No; but it was equally unthinkable that India assist in the war effort as a subject nation, and

go to the rescue of a tottering imperialism. 'We do not seek our independence,' said Gandhi, 'out of Britain's ruin.' The tone of other leaders was also softened. To some, however, notably Subhas Bose, Britain's peril was India's opportunity; nor had he any qualms as to the means to achieve the end of Britain's domination. Creditable though the attitude of the general body of the Congress was, it did not mean a change of policy. 'Though England's difficulty is not India's opportunity,' observed Nehru, 'India cannot suspend her own fight for freedom.' On the question of supporting the war effort the two pre-eminent Congress leaders had ideological differences. Gandhi wanted the Congress to be non-violent. Nehru agreed, but in a war of such magnitude he could not accept his master's extreme stand on non-violence. Rather was he inclined to fight, as an exceptional case, against the forces of aggression on condition that there should be a simultaneous declaration of India's independence. But a confirmed, hundred-per-cent pacifist as he was, Gandhi could not see eye to eye with him: on the contrary, he saw in the blitzkrieg additional justification for the doctrine of non-violence and pacifism. 'I think,' he said, 'French statesmen have shown rare courage in bowing to the inevitable and refusing to be party to senseless, mutual slaughter.' In July 1940, when an attack on Britain seemed imminent, the apostle of non-violence sent a message to the British War Cabinet imploring it and every Briton to adopt a nobler and braver way of fighting and to let Hitler and Mussolini take possession of their 'beautiful island' if they wished.¹ In reply the British Government expressed their appreciation of the motives underlying the advice but declared their intention of prosecuting the war to a victorious conclusion. Which was the more valiant, the French action or the British, Gandhi's followers saw no need to argue about: it was one of the few occasions on which the Working Committee was unwilling to follow his lead. To commit the Congress to thorough-going pacifism 'in a period of transition and dynamic change' seemed unwise to the majority of its members. In its resolution of 21 June it expressed its inability to 'go full length with him', but it recognized that

¹ *Harijan*, 6 July 1940.

he should be free to pursue his great ideal in his own way, and absolved him from responsibility for the programme and activity which the Congress felt it had to pursue.

The sort of assistance which veteran Congressmen such as Nehru and Rajagopalachari were prepared to offer was a parallel organization for self-defence and the maintenance of public security throughout the country in co-operation with sympathetic groups. This offer was followed, at the instance of Rajagopalachari, by another which was embodied in a resolution of the Working Committee. The resolution asked for an immediate declaration of full independence for India and, as a token, the formation at the Centre of a provisional national government comprising representatives of all parties and commanding the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature. On these terms the Congress was prepared 'to throw its full weight' into the task of organizing the defence of India. Although it savoured of bargaining with Britain in her struggle for self-preservation, this gesture was full of promise as it would bring the whole country into a united war effort and pave the way for cordial co-operation after the war. The proposals involved no immediate legislative changes likely to embarrass the British while the war was in progress. There were, however, several fairly large flies in the ointment. The offer implied a basic constitutional change which, so far as Britain was concerned, was impracticable while the war lasted. The declaration of independence could only be prospective, and the national government which it was proposed should be set up could not be wholly responsible to the legislature. Moreover, in view of the communal disputes and the 'two-nation' doctrine proclaimed by the Muslim League, the composition of such a government would need mutual settlement. In fact Jinnah warned the Viceroy that if the Central Council was enlarged and the Congress joined it, the Muslims would claim as many seats as allotted to Hindus. Further, could the Congress have in fact given full co-operation even if its terms were granted? According to a report in the *Hindustan Times*,¹ Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad, the new President, had no doubt about it, but

¹ 13 July 1940.

the statement made by Nehru, reported in the same journal three days before, was not so emphatic. 'We have made it perfectly clear in the past,' he said, 'that we cannot help the war effort of British imperialism or become its recruiting sergeants. That position continues completely unchanged, but to maintain our own independence, for our defence and the defence of our own freedom, we are prepared, under our own direction, to do our best.' Even so, with a little more imagination on the part of the Viceroy and a little less reluctance on the part of the authorities in Britain, the rigid bureaucratic attitude, based on the traditional ideas of prestige, could have been abandoned. Had they at that tense moment agreed to form a national government at the Centre and kept the door open for the Congress, the history of the struggle for independence might have taken a different course.

In the face of the German menace Churchill became Prime Minister and L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for India. Churchill had declared in 1930 that sooner or later the British would have to crush Gandhi and the Indian Congress and all they stood for. He had, five years later, combated tenaciously the passage of the Act of 1935 on the ground that it gave India more self-governing powers than she was fit to exercise. What could the Congress expect from him now? Amery, on the other hand, had been one of Churchill's opponents in those debates; he had taken a leading part in the evolution of the British Commonwealth into a partnership of free and equal nations and had the ambition of 'crowning his political career by presiding over India's attainment of the same Dominion status'¹. Soon after he assumed office as Secretary of State he declared that this was the objective of British policy and that the future form of Indian self-government was a matter for Indian discussion, not British dictation. His first thought was to end the deadlock. It would not end, he feared, until some initiative was taken by the British Government, through the Viceroy, providing the possibility of a way out. The Viceroy should, he suggested, make an appeal to the leaders of all political parties to meet him with a view to considering whether, in the midst of the perilous

¹ R. Coupland : *India : A Re-statement*, p. 201.

situation in which India along with Britain was placed by the war, they could not agree among themselves on ways and means of reaching some settlement whereby the provincial ministries might be enabled to resume office and the political leaders to join the Viceroy's Executive Council. Thus the Viceroy, having consulted the leaders of all political parties, issued a statement couched in friendly terms, on behalf of the British Government, on 8 August 1940, known thereafter as the August Offer.

The avowed object of the August Offer was the early achievement of such unity of national purpose in India 'as would enable her to make the fullest possible contribution to the world struggle against tyranny and aggression'. The statement recalled the declaration of October 1939 in which His Majesty's Government had made it clear that Dominion status was the objective for India, and that it was ready to expand the Governor-General's Council to include a certain number of representatives of the political parties and to set up a consultative committee provided that some measure of agreement between the major political parties in the provinces was forthcoming. Unfortunately, no such agreement had as yet been reached. His Majesty's Government felt that it could no longer postpone the expansion of the Governor-General's Council and the establishment of a body which would more closely associate Indian public opinion with the conduct of the war. Accordingly, the Governor-General proposed to invite a certain number of representative Indians to join his Executive Council and to establish a war advisory council which would include representatives of the Indian states and of other interests in the national life of India as a whole. The Government could not contemplate the transfer of its responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of administration the authority of which was denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life, nor could it be a party to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a system. Fundamental constitutional issues could not be resolved decisively at a time when the Commonwealth was engaged in a struggle for existence; but His Majesty's Government would most readily assent to the setting up, after the war, with the least possible delay, of a body

representative of the principal elements in India's national life, in order to devise the framework of the new constitution. Meanwhile it would promote in any way possible every sincere and practical step that might be taken by representative Indians themselves to reach a basis of friendly agreement as to the form which the post-war body should take. The Viceroy's statement reaffirmed what John Stuart Mill had said before and what Amery had urged, that the new constitution should be 'primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves and should originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic and political structure of Indian life'. It ended with an appeal for a suitable contribution to the victory of the world cause, and with an expression of the hope that a new bond of union and understanding would emerge to pave the way towards the attainment by India of that free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth which 'remained the proclaimed and accepted goal of the Imperial Crown and of the British Parliament'.¹

The offer certainly indicated a change for the better in the attitude of the British Government; but the policy outlined was still hemmed in by limitations and safeguards. The grant of veto to minorities was the most fatal flaw in the statement. One of the 'large and powerful elements' in India's national life, represented by the Muslim League, had announced its opposition to federation and demanded separation. Another large element, consisting of minorities comprising the depressed classes, was opposed to any democratic scheme of federation. Both were armed with a veto. Then there were the princes, who, too, could look forward to being sustained in their use of the veto against federation. If the intention was good, the August Offer and the method of seeking the acquiescence of the majority in the proposed reforms were provocative. Even Amery's resilient mind could not produce anything better, owing probably to the fact that he could not get Churchill's Cabinet to agree to anything more liberal.

Advance copies of the statement were sent to the presidents of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, to enable them to consult their respective working committees.

¹ V. P. Menon : *The Transfer of Power in India*, pp. 92-4.

They were, besides, invited for separate discussions with the Viceroy so that, before they made up their minds and sent any formal reply, misunderstandings might be cleared. It was the fervent hope of His Majesty's representative in India that the Congress no less than the other parties would be prepared to co-operate in the establishment of a central government and in the proposed war advisory council. Congress reaction, however, was amazingly abrupt and unfriendly. Maulana Azad, who had already been warned that he was not free to discuss the offer, curtly replied that he could find in the statement no meeting ground for the Congress. Other fundamental questions apart, there was no suggestion therein for a national government: there was, therefore, no scope for discussion. 'It widens the gulf,' said Gandhi, 'between India, as represented by the Congress, and England.' Nehru, who had repeatedly declared that he wanted India's freedom not merely for India's but also for England's sake because of his love for 'much that was England', dismissed the offer summarily. 'The whole conception of Dominion status for India,' he said, 'is as dead as a doornail.' The Working Committee held that the most pernicious feature of the statement was its treatment of the minority problem, which issue had been made by the British 'an insuperable barrier to India's progress'. It was 'a direct encouragement and incitement to civil discord and strife'. This uncompromising attitude, and the acerbity of the language in which the offer was summarily turned down, might have been avoided.

Had the door for negotiation been kept open, ways and means could have been found for both sides to get together and hasten the day for the transfer of power. Historians differ and will continue to differ in their verdict on the rigidity of the attitude of the Congress. For instance, in his biography of Nehru, Frank Moraes defends the attitude taken by the Congress on the occasion and observes: 'Not only was the British Government unwilling to part with power, but it appeared as if it were resolved to encourage division by using the dead weight of the minorities and princes against the nationalists. So the Congress construed the Viceroy's declaration. . . . Now that the British Government had shown its hand, they had come to

the parting of the ways. Conflict seemed inevitable.¹ On the other hand, V. P. Menon, who had the advantage of studying at close quarters the mainsprings of the policy pursued by the rulers, says: 'If the Congress leaders had only discussed the details of the reconstitution of the Executive Council, it is possible that the Viceroy would have gone more than half way to meet the Congress. In war time there was no question of converting the Executive Council into a national government. Lord Linlithgow was firm on this issue and so was His Majesty's Government. Had the Congress joined the Viceroy's Executive Council at the time, and with the Congress ministries coming back into power in the provinces, the political situation would have changed immensely to the advantage of the Congress.'²

Jinnah met the Viceroy and asked for clarification of a number of points, without committing himself. On the whole, however, the League was very pleased with the statement. The fear lest the Congress agitation should induce or impel the British Government to impose a Congress raj on India was dispelled. It meant, said the Working Committee of the League, that no future constitution, interim or final, would be adopted without the League's consent. At the same time, it repudiated the idea of a united India implicit in the statement. The partition of India was, it urged, the only solution. The League's co-operation in the conduct of the war, it said, would depend on the acceptance of the 'two-nation' doctrine. The fifty-fifty principle of Hindu/Muslim representation must be applied. The Mahasabha was jubilant. Its leader, V. D. Savarkar, was also pleased with the assurance given concerning Dominion status. As regards the question of the minorities, however, he thought the terms unacceptable to Hindus. Any attempt to cut at the root of the individuality of India as a political unit would evoke 'undying opposition from Hindustan as a whole'.

Thus the olive branch offered by the Viceroy on behalf of the British Government was spurned, and its result was to harden the Hindu-Muslim schism. It was uncharitable of the Govern-

¹ *Jawaharlal Nehru* (The Macmillan Company, New York, 1956), pp. 281-2.

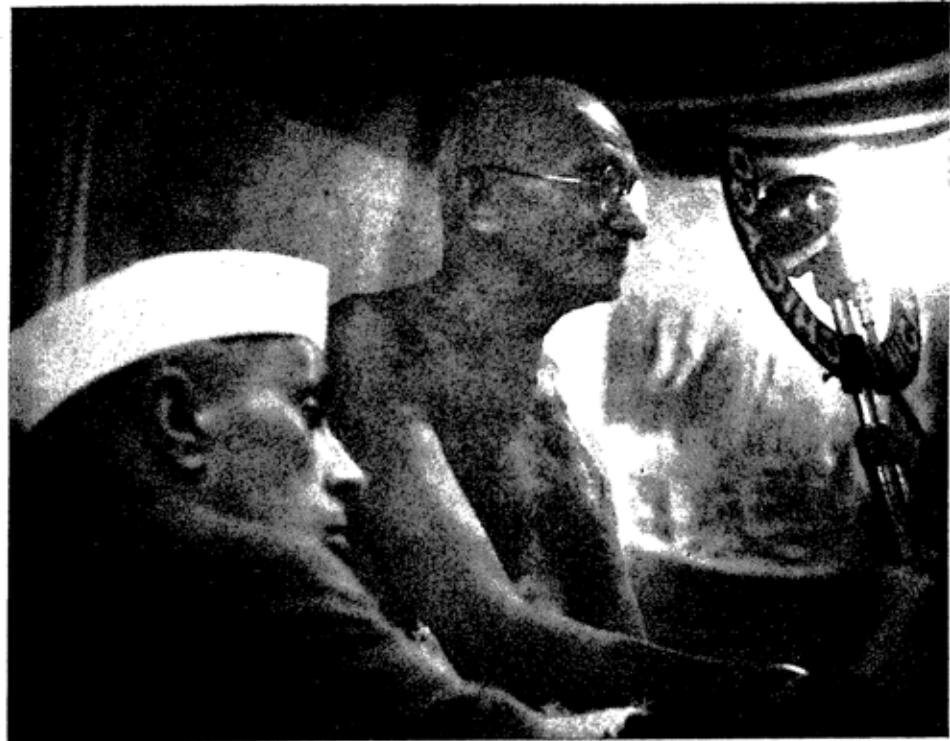
² *op. cit.*, p. 97.

ment's critics to say that the widening of the gulf between the two communities had been the deliberate intention of the Government's move, for Amery had stated in the House of Commons that the Congress 'was by far the most efficient political machine in India. Inspired by an ardent national patriotism, they have striven to make that organization national and all-embracing. If only they had succeeded, if the Congress could in fact speak, as it professes to speak, for all the main elements in India's national life, then, however advanced their demands, our problem might have been very different, and in many respects far easier, than it is today.'¹ It was because Amery regarded the unity of India as the greatest gift of the British régime, because he exhorted the minorities to adopt 'India first' as their watchword, because he held that partition was 'a counselling of despair and wholly unnecessary despair', that he antagonized the Muslim League and was reprimanded by its Working Committee. In his House of Commons speech he had pointed out that India could not be unitary in the sense that English people were in their country, but that it could still be a unity.

Shortly after the Congress rejection of the Viceroy's scheme Rajagopalachari came out with 'a sporting offer' to bring about an agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. 'If His Majesty's Government agree to a provisional national government being formed at once,' he said, 'I will undertake to persuade my colleagues to agree to the Muslim League being invited to nominate a prime minister and to let him form a government as he would consider best.' There was no response to this offer.

On 29 August, Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy to the effect that even if he could not help the British Government, he did not wish to embarrass it. This feeling could not, however, be carried to the extent of committing political *bara-kiri*. Before he took any steps he wished to 'lay bare his heart and mind to the Viceroy'. Linlithgow stated in reply that His Majesty's decided policy was made very clear in the August announcement, but that if there were any points of misunderstanding to be cleared up, he would be glad to discuss the position with

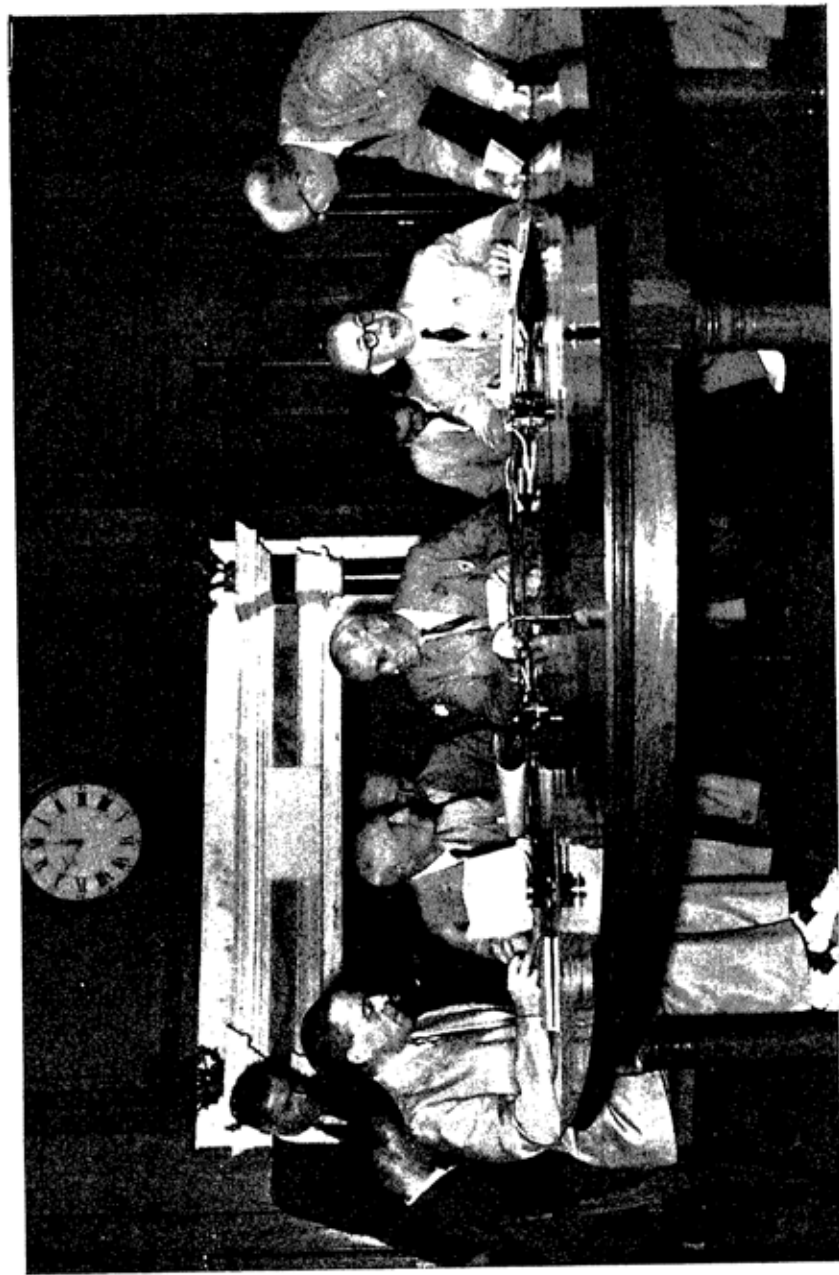
¹ *Hansard*, ccclxiv, 872.



*Mahatma Gandhi and
Pandit Nehru, New
Delhi, 1946*



*Dr Rajendra Prasad,
Delhi, 1946*



The Cabinet Mission at work, May 1946. Seated round the table, from left to right, are Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Wavell and A. V. Alexander

Gandhi. Whereupon Gandhi said that he would renew his request for an appointment after the next meeting of the All-India Congress Committee. At that meeting Maulana Azad dismissed the offer Great Britain had made through the Viceroy as 'not worth looking at'. He told the Committee that he had asked Gandhi to assume the active leadership of the Congress and that Gandhi had agreed inasmuch as there was then no difference between him and the Working Committee.

As leader of the Congress, Gandhi again sought an interview with the Viceroy. They met on 22 September. The main question for discussion was Gandhi's insistence on his right to preach against participation in the war effort. The Viceroy asked whether Gandhi would be satisfied with the liberty allowed to conscientious objectors in England. In England, while the conscientious objector was absolved from the duty of fighting and allowed even to profess his faith in public, he was not permitted to carry his opposition to the length of trying to persuade others, whether soldiers or munitions workers, to abandon their allegiance or discontinue their efforts. Gandhi replied that that was not enough for him. He would not preach, he said, to the workers in the factories, but would make declarations at large concerning the right of the nationalists to object to India's participation in the war. The Viceroy considered this sort of interference with the war effort clearly impossible.

These infructuous conversations and negotiations were a prelude to the campaign of civil disobedience launched at a meeting of the Working Committee held in Wardha on 13 October. The inveterate satyagrahi there unfolded his plan of action, and two days later he explained it in a public statement. 'The plan is simply this,' he said. 'Direct action will be commenced by Shri Vinoba Bhave and for the time being confined to him only.' Vinoba began to deliver anti-war speeches on 17 October; four days later, he was arrested and sentenced to three months' simple imprisonment. According to plan, Nehru, who had been selected to follow as the second satyagrahi, should have offered satyagraha early in November in Allahabad in his own province; but the authorities forestalled

the move by arresting him on 31 October. 'It is a small matter to me what happens to me in this trial or subsequently,' he observed in a dignified statement, made before the magistrate. 'Individuals count for little, they come and go, as I shall when my time is up.' Seven times he had been tried and convicted, and many years of his life lay buried within prison walls: an eighth time and a few more years made little difference to him. But it was no small matter what should happen to India and her millions of sons and daughters. 'That,' said he, 'is the issue before me and that ultimately is the issue before you, Sir. If the British Government imagines it can continue to exploit them and play about with them against their will, as it has done for so long in the past, then it is grievously mistaken. It has misjudged their present temper and read history in vain.'

Against Vinoba's three months' simple imprisonment, Nehru had the distinction of being sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment. He was, however, released on 4 December 1941, together with all satyagrahi prisoners whose offences were formal or symbolic in character. Thereafter the temper of the people was no longer misjudged, and the issues involved in the conflict were better understood. The man of destiny was to be jailed once more, but only to become within a short time the first prime minister of independent India.

A Frustrated Mission

THE winter of 1941-2 was for Britain and her allies a period of deepening disaster. Japan attacked the United States and Britain in the Far East and put the American Pacific fleet out of action with her unprovoked assault on the naval base of Pearl Harbour. Hongkong and the Philippine Islands were overrun, and Japanese forces advancing through Malaya routed the British and Indian troops. Two battleships were sunk by Japanese aircraft, depriving the British of command of the sea. Singapore, the great fortress which was the key to the Indian Ocean, fell in February 1942, and the British army had to withdraw from Burma after evacuating Rangoon and Mandalay. The war was thus brought to the doors of India, for Japanese troops were on her border and the Japanese navy was free to enter unchallenged the Bay of Bengal. The gravity of the situation should have brought together the two major political parties in defence of the country. Hindu-Muslim tension remained, however, the same.

In a world crisis of such magnitude, affecting alike India, Britain and the allied nations, what could Britain do to rally Indian opinion? During the twelve years that had elapsed since his bitter opposition to Dominion status for India, Churchill's jingoism had given place to realism. Throughout the period of war he had been greatly impressed by the manner in which India's gallant troops had been fighting in various theatres of war, on land, on sea and in the air. The loyalty of the Indian Army to the King-Emperor, its bravery and endurance, had won his admiration. In 1932, he had considered it preposterous that the Indian proletariat could ever live in peace, happiness or decency 'under the same polity and the same form of government as the British, Canadian and Australian democracies'. He had thought thus, not because he looked upon Indians as

inherently incapable of working democratic institutions, but because of the political, social, racial and religious conditions of the country in which they lived. Now, however, he seemed prepared to change his opinion, partly because the reality of the situation in India was gradually dawning on him, and partly because the emergencies of the war demanded a radical change in British policy towards the view already held by several of his Cabinet colleagues that one more effort should be made, in an impressive manner, to persuade the Indian people to accept an offer of Dominion status after the war.

President Roosevelt and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek were equally anxious that the tension in India should be relieved. The Generalissimo and his wife visited India in February 1942 with the object of rallying the country to the war effort against Japan. After interviewing the Indian leaders, Chiang Kai-shek tried to persuade the British authorities to concede the demands of the Congress, one of which, as then put forward, was the recognition of India's sovereign status and the formation of an Indian national government. The War Cabinet, however, frowned on such an intervention howsoever well-intentioned. Churchill wrote a polite letter to Chiang Kai-shek expressing the hope that His Excellency would be so kind as not to press the matter contrary to the wishes of the Viceroy or the King-Emperor. At the same time he formed a group of ministers to study the course of Indian affairs from day to day and advise the War Cabinet accordingly. President Roosevelt also expressed his concern at the Indian situation, and sounded Churchill on the possibilities of a settlement between the British Government and the Indian political leaders. Proposals for an interim government were, in addition, put forward by Tej Bahadur Sapru on behalf of an organization called the Non-Party Conference. The path to the proposed settlement was, however, strewn with difficulties. On 4 March 1942, Churchill cabled to the President :

We are earnestly considering whether a declaration of Dominion status after the war, carrying with it, if desired, the right to secede, should be made at this critical juncture. We must not on any account break with the Moslems, who repre-

sent a hundred million people, and the main army elements on which we must rely for the immediate fighting. We have also to consider our duty towards thirty to forty million untouchables, and our treaties with the Princes' states of India, perhaps eighty millions. Naturally we do not want to throw India into chaos on the eve of invasion.¹

The inadvisability of carrying out radical constitutional changes in the midst of a titanic struggle, made appeasement of the Congress impossible. From Jinnah, from Sir Feroze Khan Noon, a Muslim member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and from the Governor of the Punjab and others came warnings of civil war should any proposal for transferring power to a Hindu all-India government be accepted. Jinnah wrote that the Sapru proposals would introduce major changes on the basis of India becoming a single national unit, thereby torpedoing the claim of the Muslims for Pakistan, their article of faith. Noon stressed the 'great danger which would face India if the British Government yielded to brow-beating by anti-British elements in India'. It would be, he urged, a betrayal of the trust which Britain claimed she had always held on behalf of all the peoples of India, not on behalf of Congress alone. These two views were tainted by communal bias, but the Governor of the Punjab had no axe to grind. He pointed out that the Muslims in the Punjab, who were the majority in the province, were certainly worried that a constitution on the lines contemplated would leave them in the power of the Hindus, whom they already suspected of pro-Japanese tendencies. It was apprehended that Muslim soldiers would be diverted from working for the defence of India as a whole and that an unprecedented intensification of bitterness between Sikhs and Muslims would result.

On 8 March, the Japanese army entered Rangoon. It was imperative that another effort be made to seek the co-operation of the Indian people in organizing the effective defence of India. Four days after the fall of Rangoon, Churchill made a stirring announcement of the War Cabinet's unanimous decision on Indian policy with a view to rallying 'all the forces of

¹ Churchill : *The Second World War*, vol. iv, pp. 185-6.

Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader'. In order to clothe with precision the policy announced in August 1940, and to convince all classes, races and creeds of Britain's sincere resolve, the War Cabinet had agreed unitedly upon conclusions for present and future action. If those conclusions were accepted by India as a whole, it would avoid the alternative dangers that the resistance of a powerful minority might impose an indefinite veto upon the wishes of the majority or that a majority decision might be taken which would be resisted to a point 'destructive of internal harmony and fatal to the setting up of a new constitution. Believing and hoping fervently, as Churchill said, that the scheme would win a reasonable and practical measure of acceptance and thus promote concentration of all thoughts and energies upon the defence of the country, Sir Stafford Cripps was being sent to India to satisfy himself, after personal consultations, that the conclusions would achieve their purpose. The move was made in all sincerity, but the task entrusted to the gifted ambassador was difficult and thankless.

Briefly stated, the proposals were :

In order to achieve the earliest possible realization of self-government in India, the British Government proposed that steps should be taken to create a new Indian Union which would have the full status of a Dominion with the power to secede, if it chose, from the British Commonwealth.

Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities, a constitution-making body should be set up, representing both British India and the states, and the British Government undertook to accept and implement the constitution framed by that body on two conditions: (a) Any province or provinces which did not acquiesce in the new constitution would be entitled to frame a constitution of their own, giving them the same full status as the Indian Union, and any state or states should be similarly free to adhere to the new constitution or not; (b) a treaty should be negotiated between the British Government and the constitution-making body to cover all matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands.

In the meantime the British Government would retain control of the defence of India as part of their world war effort, but the task of organizing the military, moral and material resources of India would rest with the Government of India

in co-operation with its peoples, and to that end it invited the immediate participation of India's leaders in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations.¹

In view of the past experience of infructuous efforts at reconciliation, the offer might have been made more precise and acceptable. Unfortunately, the primary object of winning the war engrossed the attention of the Cabinet to such an extent that it did not occur to its members how little there was in the offer to enthuse political India. Probably, for the success of the mission, it banked on Cripps' persuasive powers and friendship with Congress leaders, for with his wide experience and liberal outlook, holding the high offices of Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, Cripps could rely not only on full support from his colleagues in the War Cabinet but also on co-operation from many Indian politicians, as he was known to have genuine sympathy with Indian aspirations. Respected and trusted by Gandhi as a man of deep religious convictions, he was also a friend of Nehru, and his radical socialism was a link with left-wingers such as the eminent socialist Jayaprakash Narayan. If anyone could convince India of the good intentions of the British Government, it was he. The very fact, however, that he was *persona grata* to the Congress, says Reginald Coupland, who was in India at the time and was invited by Cripps to join his staff, 'made him the reverse to the League'.² That, no doubt, was the reason why in his first public statement in India, while frankly admitting that his past contacts had been closer with the Congress than with other parties, he affirmed his conviction that all planning of India's future must pay regard to 'the deep anxieties which undoubtedly exist amongst the Muslims and the other communities'.

Reaching Delhi on 22 March, armed with the British Government's draft declaration to serve as the basis on which he could negotiate with the leaders of the political parties and communities concerned, Cripps lost no time in starting preliminary conversations with the Viceroy and members of his Execu-

¹ R. Coupland: *The Constitutional Problem in India*, 2nd impression, Part II, pp. 273-4.

² R. Coupland: *The Cripps Mission*, p. 24.

tive Council. Thereafter he had private conversations with the leaders of all parties and explained to them the main features of the declaration drafted in the hope of enlisting their co-operation during the emergency. Although the immediate settlement in view concerned British India only, the suggestions for the future concerned the princely states also. Cripps had, therefore, several interviews with the representatives of the princes. Press conferences were held at frequent intervals, at which he enjoyed being heckled by journalists, mostly Congressmen, and encouraged the most pointed questions. There were broadcasts to the Indian public, too. Such free and frank public discussion of the issues at stake was the most refreshing feature of the negotiations: it brought, it was felt, a breath of fresh air to Delhi. Above all, it enabled the peacemaker to convince the Indian people at the moment, whatever was said to the contrary later, that the British Government's proposals were sincere.

The declaration was a definite advance on the August Offer. But while it conceded the Congress demand for a unified India, the option given to the provinces to stay outside the Union kept the door open for separation. The offer of Dominion status was, said Gandhi, a post-dated cheque on a tottering bank. Moreover, it was stipulated that the scheme outlined by Cripps could only be operative if it met with a sufficiently general approval of the various sections of Indian opinion. Further, no major change in the constitution could be made during the war. Worse still, the cut-and-dried plan vouchsafed by the British Government could not be amended in any way. India had to take it or leave it.

The decision lay primarily with the Congress. But even if the trusted envoy had succeeded in winning its support, could he have carried all the other warring factions with him? The preliminary conversations and consultations gave him an inkling of the difficulties he would soon be up against. Wishful thinking had inspired hopes in the British Cabinet that if the Congress accepted the draft declaration, Jinnah would also come in and that the other minorities would have to follow suit. But Cripps soon discovered that neither the Congress nor the

League chief was enamoured of the British move to enlist the support of all parties. The other Congress leaders were also opposed to the plan, for they did not approve of the inclusion of the Indian states in the constitution-making body. The greatest obstacle was the Congress demand that the Viceroy's Council should be forthwith replaced by a Cabinet Government with full power. Cripps contended that the demand, if complied with, would result in setting up an absolute dictatorship of the majority, and it could hardly be expected that the minorities would accept such an arrangement. Moreover, he urged, it would involve fundamental constitutional changes which could not be undertaken in time of war. The Muslim League was piqued because Pakistan was not 'unequivocally accepted'. The Sikhs feared that they would be left at the mercy of the League. The Mahasabha could not reconcile itself to the risk of a vivisection of India. The only realist among those who participated in the conversations was Rajagopalachari. He was agreeable to the postponement for future consideration of that part of the plan which related to the future, notably the question of nomination instead of election of the states' representatives on the constitution-making body. Without prejudicing such controversial issues he was, he said, in favour of the Congress agreeing to join the proposed national government, provided that agreement could be reached as regards defence responsibilities.

Meanwhile the Japanese were thundering at the north-east and south-east gates of India. They had occupied the Andaman Islands, an outpost of India. On 6 April the war was vividly brought home by the first bombs falling on Indian soil, on the seaboard of Madras. The need for a national war front to keep the people calm and at their work was keenly felt. Even if the Congress and other political parties could not get together to resolve their political differences in the long term, this was a crisis in which they should sink their differences for a moment and combine to present a united front to the invaders.

The Japanese attacks having demonstrated the immediate need for concerted action to protect the country, the Delhi discussions centred on defence. On behalf of the Congress it was

urged that there should be an Indian defence minister to rally the people to the cause of the Allies and to give the maximum help in the war effort. This demand was readily conceded on the British side. It was felt, however, that the Commander-in-Chief could not transfer his major duties to a civilian when the country was in the throes of a deadly struggle. Thereupon proposals for apportioning responsibility were interchanged with a view to surmounting this obstacle, and a settlement seemed possible. On 10 April, however, when Maulana Azad and Nehru saw Cripps, they were amazed, according to a statement made by Nehru at a press conference, to find that 'rigidity' had come into Sir Stafford's talk. During the interview it became clear, he added, that all that they were being offered was the August Offer with minor modifications. The constitutional issue had not arisen before in the negotiations, and the question of proportion of the various parties and communities in the interim government had not been discussed. The argument about majority dictatorship had only been mentioned in connexion with the wider constitutional issue of a national government, in which the Congress was expected to participate. It was claimed that the interim government should function 'with full powers as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as a constitutional head'¹; but Cripps regarded this as virtually a demand for the immediate acquisition of Dominion status. National independence, contemplated in the draft declaration as the outcome of a post-war settlement, was demanded forthwith, for although no such undertaking could be given as it would necessitate an Act of Parliament, the Congress was aiming for a short-cut independence first and settlement of the issues later. Inasmuch as the negotiations were taking place on the distinct understanding that there could be no basic change in the constitution, no major Act of Parliament, in the middle of the War, Cripps regarded the Congress claim as an ultimatum breaking off negotiations. Rejecting it indignantly, he left Delhi for London on 12 April, empty-handed. Welcomed by India as an old and trusted friend, he returned to England as the discredited agent of imperialism. Although Nehru would have

¹ R. Coupland: *India: A Re-statement*, p. 216.

liked to fight by the side of the democracies and help in the war effort, he saw no alternative to the rejection of the Cripps offer, and sighed that his 'old friend had allowed himself to become the Devil's advocate'.¹

The failure of the mission killed the hopes, kindled by it, of an India united in resistance to the threatened invasion. The breath of fresh air vanished in the mist of distrust which enveloped the whole country. Even the statement in the House of Commons of the Secretary of State for India that the declaration still represented the settled policy of the Crown and Parliament, and that the principles and proposals introduced in it remained in their full scope and integrity, could not dispel it. While maintaining that the mission had been 'very far from a failure', Amery observed that it had been, to adopt an epigram of Cripps himself, the epilogue of an old chapter and also the prologue of a new. In the old chapter, as he put it, the contending elements in India had 'attempted to attain their ends by belabouring His Majesty's Government'. In the new chapter, Indians were beginning to realize that the key to India's problems was in their own hands.

The success of Japanese arms created great consternation among the people. Subhas Chandra Bose had slipped over the north-west frontier into Russia and thence to Berlin, and over the Azad Hind (Free India) Radio in Berlin, he regaled thousands of Indian listeners with forecasts of Britain's approaching doom. Incapable of visualizing danger to India's freedom in the humiliation inflicted on British arms, or certain disaster in the victory of the Axis powers, many hailed the news as a prelude to India's liberation. Happily, Gandhi, Nehru and other Congress leaders repudiated the idea that freedom could come to India through the invasion of any foreign nation, no matter what its professions and propaganda might be. When the All-India Congress Committee met in April at Allahabad, it warned against the mischievous trends. 'In case an invasion takes place,' the Committee advised, 'it must be resisted.' Such resistance, it declared, could take place only in the form of non-violent non-co-operation because the British Government

¹ *Hindustan Times*, 27 April 1942.

had prevented the organization of defence by the people in any other way. 'We may not bend the knee to the aggressor nor obey any of his orders. We may not look to him for favours nor fall to his bribes. If he wishes to take possession of our homes and our fields, we will refuse to give them up, even if we have to die in the effort to resist them.' Although Gandhi had expressed the hope that the Committee would give clear instructions about non-violent non-co-operation in defence against external aggression, Nehru was against the advocacy of non-violence. He wanted the people's resistance to be forthright and militant, but he yielded eventually to his pacifist master's view. One could see his hand in the draft resolution. Once more was public opinion rallied to Gandhi's side and faith in his leadership restored. Again the initiative was his.

‘Quit India!’

HOLDING in his hands the key to Congress policy and strategy, Gandhi was determined to lead India along the path of pacifism, unshaken in his belief, even on the eve of invasion, that the only way to save India from the horrors of the threatened Japanese attack was to confront the hostile armies with a country-wide campaign of non-violent resistance. This, he knew, was impossible so long as the defence of India was in British hands, and Britain was unhappily regarded by many people as Enemy No. 1. Hence the Mahatma's fiat—Britain must go forthwith. Early in May 1942, in an article in *Harijan*, he called upon the British to withdraw from India, as a prelude to the ‘Quit India’ campaign which he was about to launch.

For a mind as sensitive as his, the consciousness of the risks involved in the withdrawal of British power during so acute a crisis, and of his own responsibility for the consequence, was overwhelming. He was also painfully conscious that it would need a good deal of pleading to justify his choice to mankind, particularly to friends in Britain, China and the United States. Accordingly, he conducted an elaborate propaganda campaign from April onwards. On 13 April, a long statement was issued from his ashram at Sevagram on ‘the ill-fated proposal’ of Cripps, who, in Gandhi's opinion, had become ‘part of the imperial machinery’ and fallen under its spell. At the same time Gandhi frankly asked the people of India not to blind themselves to their own defects. The attainment of independence was an impossibility until the communal tangle was solved. Preparations for the partition of the country were silently going on. ‘I dare not contemplate the actuality,’ he said. ‘I should not like to be its living witness.’

Simultaneously with the announcement of the Cripps

Mission, Gandhi had received a cable from two of India's sincere British friends, Horace Alexander and Agatha Harrison, reminding him of 'Andrews' Legacy'. None had been so close to Gandhi as Charlie Andrews while he was alive; none had interpreted the viewpoint of Indians to the British nor that of the British to Indians so well, and none had striven so steadfastly as he to promote mutual understanding between India and Britain. The reference to Andrews' Legacy was to remind Gandhi of what he had said about the splendid legacy which Andrews, as a true servant of England and India, had left behind. 'He said on his death-bed from which he was never to rise,' Gandhi had recalled of that mournful occasion, "'Mohan, swaraj is coming!' Both Englishmen and Indians can make swaraj come. It is possible, quite possible, for the best Englishmen and the best Indians to meet together and never to separate until they have evolved a formula acceptable to both. The legacy left by Andrews is worth the effort. That is the thought that rules me, whilst I contemplate the benign face of Andrews and what innumerable deeds of love he performed so that India may take her independent place among the nations of the earth.' Gandhi did not need such a reminder. He sent his British friends a long explanation of the failure of the mission. He had told Cripps, he wrote, that he was speaking to him with Andrews' spirit as his witness. 'You know the result,' he added, 'It was inevitable.... My firm opinion is that the British should leave India now in an orderly manner and not run the risk that they did in Singapore and Malaya and Burma.'¹ If the Japanese army ever came to India, it would, he believed, come as the enemy of Britain, not of India. An article in *Harijan* (26 April) in which he elaborated his plea for the withdrawal of the British from India shows how his mind was working: 'I see no Indian freedom,' he wrote, 'peeping through all this preparation for the so-called defence of India. It is a preparation pure and simple for the defence of the British Empire, whatever may be asserted to the contrary. If the British left India to her fate as they had to leave Singapore, non-violent India would not lose anything.

¹ D. G. Tendulkar : *Mahatma*, vol. vi, p. 92.

Probably, the Japanese would leave India alone. Perhaps India, if the main parties composed their differences, as they probably would, would be able effectively to help China in the way of peace and in the long run even play a decisive part in the promotion of world peace.'

It was most unfortunate that Gandhi felt convinced that now defeat stared the British in the face they would have to leave India. 'How much more creditable,' he thought, 'how much braver it would be for the British, to offer battle in the West and leave the East to adjust her own position! There is no guarantee that the British will be able to protect, during this war, all her vast possessions: they have become a dead weight round her. If she wisely loosens herself from this weight, and the Nazis, the Fascists or the Japanese, instead of leaving India alone, choose to subjugate her, they will find that they have to hold more than they can in their iron hoop. They will find it much more difficult than Great Britain has. Their very rigidity will strangle them.' The British system had an elasticity which served so long as it had no rivals, but this elasticity was of no avail *vis-à-vis* the Nazis. He had, he recalled, said more than once that 'the Nazi power had risen as a Nemesis to punish Britain for her sins of exploitation and enslavement of the Asiatic and African races'. Thus, while trying to remove cobwebs from his readers' minds, he was weaving more and more for himself. There would be neither majority nor minority communities, he believed, in the absence of the paralysing British arms. He had no doubt that 'the natural leaders will have wisdom enough to evolve an honourable solution of their difficulties'. 'This presupposes,' he added, 'that Japan and the other powers will leave India alone. If they do not, I should hope even then for wisdom to guide the principal parties to devise a scheme whereby they all can act with one mind to face the new menace.'¹ Alas, not only before but also after the British left the country, the wisdom to act with one mind seemed to desert the 'natural leaders'!

One of the questions put to him through the *Harijan* question box was: 'You declared the other day that Jawaharlal Nehru

¹ *Harijan*, 26 April 1942.

was your "legal heir". How do you like the idea of your legal heir advocating guerilla warfare against the Japanese? What will happen to your *ahimsa* (non-violence) when Jawaharlal openly advocates violence and Rajaji (Rajagopalachari) wants arms and military training for the whole nation?' Gandhi explained that what he had said was that Jawaharlal would be virtually his heir. 'That meant,' he said, 'that he would take my place.' 'I am sorry,' he added, 'that he has developed a fancy for guerilla warfare. But I have no doubt that it will be a nine days' wonder. It will take no effect. It is foreign to the Indian soil. Twenty-two years' incessant preaching and practice of non-violence, however imperfect it has been, could not suddenly be obliterated by the mere wish of Jawaharlal and Rajaji, powerful though their influence is.'¹ Thus argued the apostle of non-violence. But how often his teaching was forsaken, how often violence disfigured the Congress record, is a matter of history. Wishful thinking had for the time being blurred his vision and judgement.

At a small gathering of his Congress supporters in the Madras Legislature (23 April) Rajagopalachari, who had made strenuous efforts to bring about an understanding between the Congress and the Muslim League, got a sensational resolution passed for submission to the All-India Congress Committee. It recommended the acceptance in principle of Pakistan as a basis of settlement between the Congress and the Muslim League. The object underlying the move was to assert that progress was impossible without an agreement with the League, that it was not a wise policy to sacrifice the chances of formation of a national government for the doubtful advantage of continuing the controversy over the unity of India, in fact that it was necessary 'to choose the lesser evil'. The feeling of indignation and resentment against this move at the Allahabad meeting of the Committee, held from 29 April to 2 May, was so intense that Rajagopalachari's position in the Working Committee became untenable. What Rajagopalachari himself thought of his position we do not know; but he had the courage of his conviction, which few among Gandhi's followers had,

¹ *ibid.*

and, after all, the Madras resolution was only intended to get negotiations with the League started. The basis suggested might be repudiated, but the possibilities of securing on any other basis the immediate end in view, namely the installation of a national government to meet the existing emergency, should be explored. Resigning from the Working Committee to leave himself free to act according to his judgement, he moved the resolution at the general meeting. It was rejected by 120 votes to 15. A counter-resolution was adopted by a large majority to the effect that for any component state or territorial unit to secede from the Indian union or federation would be detrimental to the best interests of the people of the remaining states and provinces, and of the country as a whole.

At the end of April the Working Committee declared that the war crisis had made it impossible for the Congress to consider any proposal concerning the governance of the country which sought to retain 'even a partial measure of British authority'. For India's safety and her own, Britain must abandon her hold on India. Invasion must be resisted, but 'such resistance could take the form of non-violent non-co-operation'. This declaration reflected the revival of full faith in Gandhi's leadership; it showed also that the national organization had closed its ranks. Nehru and Rajagopalachari had been the outspoken critics among Congressmen of the Gandhian policy. Nehru had up to this time emphatically declared that the Japanese invasion, when it came, should be stoutly resisted, even if it meant the temporary abrogation of non-violence. Now, however, his sense of loyalty prevailed; for civil defence he advocated the formation of a purely civilian movement. Only Rajagopalachari remained unbending and uncompromising to the Congress attitude, and was backed by the few followers who had stood by him since his brilliant premiership of Madras (1937-9). In a series of speeches he challenged the Congress policy and maintained that it would be a crime for Britain to leave India to chaos during the crisis created by the Japanese aggression. But the High Command's fiat was law.

Gandhi did not pause to consider how immediate British withdrawal could leave a free and united India, divided as it

was by internal strife. Nor did he, in the fog of loose thinking, brace himself to face the facts as they were and ask himself how his plan for repelling the Japanese attack without the co-operation of the British could be implemented. He was thinking of only one aspect of the problem—India's freedom—and believed everything could be adjusted without harm to India's defence. He did not visualize what might happen if the Indian Army, which he regarded as the tool of British imperialism, was disbanded. As Indian troops were interlinked with the other troops of the allied nations overseas, the battle front would have been broken wherever such troops were in action, and the defence of India ultimately undermined; but this aspect of his proposal he completely overlooked. On 11 May he appealed to every Briton to support him in his demand that Britain should retire immediately from every Asiatic and African possession. This was, he urged, essential for the safety of the world. This appeal evoked many questions from the foreign press and public. 'Are you not inviting the Japanese to attack India by asking the British rulers to withdraw?' 'I am not,' replied Gandhi. 'I feel convinced that the British presence is the incentive for the Japanese attack. If the British wisely decided to withdraw and leave India to manage her own affairs in the best way she could, the Japanese would be bound to reconsider their plans. The very novelty of the British stroke will confound the Japanese, dissolve the subdued hatred against the British, and the atmosphere will be set up for the ending of an unnatural state of things that has dominated and choked Indian life.'¹ 'This is a drastic disease,' he said in reply to another question, 'requiring a drastic remedy—complete and immediate orderly withdrawal of the British from India... and from all non-European possessions... It will at once put the allied cause on a completely moral basis and may lead to a most honourable peace between the warring nations.' The British standpoint was: 'We would gladly retire, if we know to whom we should hand over the reins.' 'My answer now is,' said Gandhi, 'leave India to God. If that is too much, then leave her to anarchy.' In answer to a query during an interview

¹ *Harijan*, 3 May 1942.

with a *News Chronicle* representative he elaborated what he meant by stating: 'I have said in the plainest terms that in my proposal there is no question of entrusting the administration to any person or party. That would be a necessary consideration, if the withdrawal was part of a settlement. Under my proposal, they have to leave India in God's hands—but, in the modern parlance, to anarchy, and that anarchy may lead to internecine warfare for some time or to unrestrained dacoities. From these a true India will rise in the place of the false one we see.'¹ In reply to one more question put at a press conference on 18 May, he added: 'I have said that there should be unadulterated non-violent non-co-operation, and if the whole of India responded and unanimously offered it, I should show that, without shedding a single drop of blood, the Japanese arms—or any combination of arms—can be sterilized. That involves the determination of India not to give any quarter on any point whatsoever, and to be ready to risk the loss of several million lives. But I would consider that cost very cheap and victory won at that cost glorious.'²

Depressing reading though this is, it is but fair to sum up in Gandhi's own words why he was prepared to see India left to chaos. He was asked whether the resultant anarchy would not be worse than that which existed at the moment. 'There is ordered anarchy around and about us,' he observed. 'I am sure that the anarchy that may result, because of the British withdrawal or their refusal to listen to us and our decision to defy their authority, will in no way be worse than the present anarchy. After all, those who are unarmed cannot produce a frightful amount of violence or anarchy, and I have a faith that out of that anarchy may arise pure non-violence. But to be a passive witness of the terrible violence that is going on, of the terrible anarchy that is going on in the name of resisting a possible foreign aggression, is a thing I can't stand.'³

In June 1942, another journalist, Louis Fischer, always pro-Congress, had an interview with Gandhi at Wardha. 'When this war started,' he reminded Gandhi, 'you said you wished to do

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

² *ibid.*, p. 104. ³ *ibid.*, p. 113-4.

nothing to embarrass the British Government. Now, obviously, your attitude has changed. What has happened?' Gandhi admitted that in September 1939 he had announced, after his talks with the Viceroy, that the Congress movement would not obstruct the war effort. He, however, was not the Congress. 'In fact,' said he, 'I am not in the Congress. Congress is more anti-British and anti-war than I am, and I have had to curb its desire to interfere with the war effort.' He did not wish to humiliate the British, but they 'must go'. 'I am more than ever convinced,' he declared, 'that Britain cannot win this war unless she leaves India.'¹

This defeatist attitude meant making a free gift of India to Japan. 'If you demand,' said Fischer, 'that the British pack up and go bag and baggage, you are simply asking the impossible. You do not mean, do you, that they must also withdraw their armies?' For at least two minutes Gandhi said nothing. Then he said: 'You are right. Britain and America, and other countries too, can keep their armies here and use Indian territory as a base for military operations. I do not wish Japan to win the war. I do not want the Axis to win. But I am sure that Britain cannot win, unless the Indian people become free. Britain is weaker and Britain is morally indefensible, while she rules India. I do not wish to humiliate England... They could operate the railroads. They would also need order in the ports where they receive their supplies. They could not have riots in Bombay and Calcutta. These matters would require co-operation and common effort.'

'Why have you not communicated your plan to the Viceroy?' asked Fischer. 'He should be told that you have no objection now to the use of India as a base for allied military operations.' 'No one has asked me,' replied Gandhi. 'I have written about my proposed civil disobedience movement in order to prepare the public for it. If you put me some direct questions in writing about this matter, I will answer them in *Harijan*.' The question why, in spite of the previous announcement that the Congress would not obstruct the war effort, the Viceroy had not been informed of his plan, remained unanswered. What a grievous

¹ *ibid.*, p. 116.

blunder not to have resumed his conversations with the Viceroy, before taking the fateful decision to ask the British to quit! And how he miscalculated the course of the global conflict! 'If you look at this in its historic perspective,' said Fischer, 'you are doing a novel and remarkable thing—you are ordaining the end of the empire.'

Gandhi felt that an explanation was due to China and America for his bewildering demand for the withdrawal of the British. To Chiang Kai-shek he wrote (14 June 1942) that it was not meant in any way to weaken India's defence against the Japanese or to embarrass the Chinese in their struggle. The failure of the Cripps Mission, he said, had left a deep wound which was still running. Out of that anguish had come a cry for the immediate withdrawal of British power so that India could look after herself and help China to the best of her ability. The people of India felt certain that their country could play a decisive part not only on her behalf but also on behalf of China and world peace. Many like him felt that every possible effort should be made to ensure independence and that freedom of action was urgently needed. 'Unless we make the effort,' he wrote, 'there is grave danger of public feeling in India going into wrong and harmful channels. There is every likelihood of subterranean sympathy for Japan growing simply in order to weaken and oust British authority in India. This feeling may take the place of robust confidence in our ability never to look to outsiders for help in winning our freedom.'²

To President Roosevelt Gandhi wrote (1 July): 'I hold that the full acceptance of my proposal and that alone can put the allied cause on an unassailable basis. I venture to think that the allied declaration that the allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow, so long as India and, for that matter, Africa, are exploited by Great Britain, and America has the Negro problem in her own home. But in order to avoid all complications, in my proposal I have confined myself to India.' 'I have suggested,' he added, 'that if the allies think it necessary, they may keep their troops, at their own expense, in India, not for keep-

² *ibid.*, pp. 141-3.

ing internal order but for preventing Japanese aggression and defending China... The allied troops will remain in India during the war under treaty with the Free India Government that may be formed by the people of India without any outside interference, direct or indirect.¹

The Working Committee of the Congress met on 6 July. With Gandhi's advice and assistance it drafted the momentous resolution for adoption by the All-India Congress Committee, calling upon Britain to quit the country. It naturally followed, claimed Gandhi, that the Congress alone, the accredited representative of the people, could take over power from the British. The resolution indicated what would then happen: 'On the withdrawal of British rule in India responsible men and women will come together to form a provisional government representative of all important sections of the people of India, which will later evolve a scheme by which a constituent assembly can be convened in order to prepare a constitution for the government of India acceptable to all sections of the people.' What if the demand that the British should quit was rejected? The answer was 'revolt, a nation-wide open rebellion'. The Congress would then be reluctantly compelled to utilize, under the leadership of Gandhi, all its non-violent strength.

What the future constitution should be, neither the leader nor the other members of the Congress had clearly visualized. One thing was certain: the different political factions would quarrel amongst themselves. Whether their differences could be adjusted or whether they would lead to an internecine feud, whether the new constitution would be a democratic one or an autocracy, none could say. As regards one aspect of it, however, Gandhi had no doubt: 'After the restoration of India to the nation, there will be no central government. The people's representatives will have to construct it.' What would happen in the interval? Without any central government how could the Japanese aggressors be repelled? Of this vital issue none had any clear idea. Gandhi, however, could not ignore the possibility of widespread disorder and bloodshed inherent in a mass campaign of civil disobedience. 'If, in spite of precautions,

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 144-5.

rioting does take place,' he observed, 'it cannot be helped.' Nor was there now any room for negotiation: 'Either they recognize India's independence or they don't.... There is no question of one more chance.' It was, he proclaimed, 'open rebellion'.

In an article written a little before and published on the day he was arrested Gandhi wrote: 'I can but do or die.' His militant tone, incompatible with the avowed non-violent character of the struggle and coming at a moment most critical for India, provoked loud dissent from almost all quarters; even some of his close associates were shaken. Rajagopalachari and three leading Madras Congressmen privately entered a friendly but closely reasoned emphatic protest. 'The withdrawal of the Government,' they wrote, 'without simultaneous replacement by another, must involve the dissolution of the State and society itself. However difficult the achievement of a Hindu-Muslim settlement may be, while the British Government is here and functioning, it is essential before a demand for withdrawal can reasonably be made.... The party to gain immediately by the movement will be Japan.'

For one entering the battlefield in the spirit of a crusader, the outcome is either victory or death. The Congress General had launched his crusade in that spirit. What of his loyal and devoted disciple, Nehru, who had constantly raised his voice against Nazism and Fascism? Neither wanted the Axis powers to win; but Nehru could not, like Gandhi, view with equanimity the prospect of the Japanese overrunning India. Nehru, says Frank Moraes,¹ detected in the Mahatma's speech and writings a new urgency and passion, and was disturbed by this development. The only effective action it would lead to was mass civil disobedience, which, thought Nehru, would hamper the war effort at a time when India herself stood in grave peril of invasion. Nor did he approve of the strong nationalist overtones in Gandhi's speeches at such an hour of peril. It seemed to him that the Mahatma's approach was too narrow and ignored the larger international considerations. He went several times to Sevagram to discuss the doubts which his master's words had engendered in his mind, as they had in thousands of other

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 294.

minds all over the world. The outcome of the discussions is summarized in Moraes' words :

Gandhi agreed with him that perhaps he had tended to ignore certain international factors, and promised to remedy this omission, which he subsequently did. But on the basic issue of action he would not be shaken.

'We cannot passively submit to Britain's autocratic and repressive policy in our country,' Gandhi explained earnestly. 'If we do not do something to challenge it, our people will be completely demoralized, and whatever the end of the war might be, we shall have put back the clock of freedom for many years. Besides, if we submit to our rulers we shall also submit to the invaders. Inaction will paralyse us. Action will strengthen our fibre.'

Confronted with the sullen passivity of the people, Jawaharlal was inclined to agree.

'But,' he argued, 'however justified action or conflict with the British Raj might be on moral grounds, would it not seriously hamper the war effort ? And at a time when India is in danger ?'

'You must trust in God,' Gandhi adjured him. 'What you and I want to change is the moral basis of the war. India is the symbol of colonial domination. If we remain unfree, what hope is there for the other enslaved countries of the world ? Then indeed this war will have been fought in vain.'

As often before, they argued back and forth.¹

One outcome of these discussions was distinctly advantageous. In deference to Nehru's views on Congress responsibility in the international crisis, Gandhi agreed at the meeting of the Working Committee on 6 July that if India were declared free and a provisional government set up, that government would throw all its resources into the struggle for freedom and against aggression, and would co-operate fully with the allied nations in the defence of India. At the same time, in a resolution of 11 July, the Working Committee held out a threat of open rebellion if the British Government should fail to respond to the Congress offer to co-operate on its own terms. Gandhi had as yet no definite programme for the conduct of this unprecedented threat. It was apparent, however, that his mind was moving in the direction of mass resistance. How would Nehru react to the idea ? Gandhi put this question to Narendra Deva when

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 294-5. (Quoted by permission of the Macmillan Company, New York.)

he met him at Sevagram. The Socialist leader thought that although Nehru did not approve of the decision, he would not stay out. Later, when they were in jail at Ahmednagar, he revealed that Jawaharlal had expressed the opinion that the step had been taken too hurriedly. 'It might have been possible,' Nehru thought, 'to bring Britain to terms with the help of American pressure.'

There were still some who cherished the hope that in view of protests from friends and criticism in the British and American press, the Congress ultimatum might be withdrawn before the All-India Congress Committee endorsed it. All that the Working Committee did, however, was to make a slight change in the policy of full-scale pacifism. The Congress, it asserted, was not isolationist. A free India would become an ally of the united nations and could use its arms as well as its non-violent forces in the common cause. Except for this acknowledgement of its responsibility for the defence of the country there was no change in the tone and temper of the Congress. The Committee declared on 5 August that developments since July had confirmed 'the futility of the British promises'. Then came the clarion call for a mass struggle on non-violent lines under the leadership of Gandhi.

All the while the Government of India had exercised great patience. Lord Linlithgow was on very friendly terms with Gandhi; he thought Gandhi would still avert a clash and waited to see what decision the All-India Congress Committee would take. But at its momentous meeting held in Bombay on 7 August, Gandhi made his fighting speech. 'We shall get our freedom by fighting,' said the chief servant of the nation, now its commander-in-chief. 'It cannot fall from the skies.' 'Do or Die', was the battle cry he gave to his followers in words of mystic power :

Here is a *mantra*, a short one, that I give you. . . . 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. . . . Take a pledge, with God and your own conscience as witness, that you will no longer rest till freedom is achieved. . . . He who loses his life will gain it, he who will seek to save it will lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted.

On the following day, the 'Quit India' resolution was carried. Only 13 out of about 250 members present voted against it. Freedom, it emphasized, would enable India to resist aggression effectively with the people's united will and strength behind it. For the vindication of India's unalienable right to freedom and independence, it sanctioned the launching of a mass struggle on non-violent lines. In moving the resolution, Nehru stated that both Gandhi and he had traversed a long distance in reaching the decision embodied in it. The resolution was in no sense a challenge to anyone. If the Congress proposals were accepted, it would change the position, internal and international, for the better from every point of view. The next step was to approach the Viceroy, as representing the British Government, and the heads of the allied nations for their good offices for an honourable settlement. But Nehru did not realize the grave miscalculation that he and the other Congress leaders were making; nor did Gandhi, who was under the illusion that a settlement could still be reached with the British Government, and he looked forward to a meeting with the Viceroy for his advice as to the course he should pursue in regard to the resolution.

At this stage it would be pertinent to trace the genesis of the 'Quit India' idea. Who was its originator and author? Certainly not Gandhi, nor the Congress. It was not a novel suggestion for the severance of the British connexion with India, for it was implicit in the theory of trusteeship underlying Pitt's India Act and was to be the culmination of British policy in India. Steadfastness and faith on the part of the rulers in pursuing the policy were, no doubt, lacking, but the principle was never abrogated. Although the Congress and its veteran leader framed their peremptory demand with all the strength of the national movement and an ultimatum to enforce it, the credit of first advocating the resignation of power to the people must go to Mountstuart Elphinstone, Lord Hastings and other wise statesmen of their generation.¹

When Gandhi went to bed after the fateful meeting of 8 August, rumours were afloat that arrest of the Congress leaders

¹ See Ch. 3.

was imminent; but he felt confident that he would be given an opportunity to take up the subject-matter of the resolution with the Viceroy, with a view to exploring the possibilities of a settlement. He had no intention of launching the mass struggle forthwith. 'After my last night's speech,' he said to his secretary, Mahadev Desai, 'they will never arrest me.' To Kasturba, his wife, he expressed the same conviction.

Rising early as usual at about 4 o'clock in the morning (9 August) he had just offered his prayers, when the police commissioner appeared with a warrant, under the Defence of India Rules, for his arrest and detention. He was given half an hour to get ready. Unperturbed, though amazed, Gandhi took his usual breakfast—goat milk and fruit juice; chanted with his colleagues his favourite hymn, 'Vaishanava Jana', and verses from the Koran; and quietly left the house, leaving the following message: 'Let every non-violent soldier write out the slogan "Do or Die" on a piece of paper or cloth, and stick it on his clothes so that in case he dies in the course of offering satyagraha he might be distinguished by that sign from other elements who do not subscribe to non-violence.'¹

The members of the Working Committee and several other leading Congressmen were arrested simultaneously. Numerous other arrests followed. The All-India Congress Committee and the provincial Congress committees were banned except in the North-West Frontier Province. The destination of the arrested members of these committees and of the Working Committee was kept a secret, but it transpired that Gandhi and his party were detained in the Aga Khan Palace at Poona. Serious disturbances broke out as the report of the arrests spread all over India. Kasturba, who was left behind, soon courted arrest by addressing a meeting, and joined Gandhi. Hartals, protest meetings, demonstrations and the closing of shops and restaurants, forbidden by the new Defence of India Rules, were the order of the day. A fiat of the Government of India prohibited the printing or publishing of any factual news, including reports, speeches or statements by members of the public, relating to the mass movement or to the measures taken by the Govern-

¹ D. G. Tendulkar, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

ment against the rebels, except news from official and other approved sources. The unlawful Congress Radio, however, speaking from 'somewhere in India', kept the public informed of what was happening, of incidents such as military exercises in certain places, firing and lathi charges, labour strikes, the closing of the Jamshedpur steelworks, and tales of repression in Midnapur. Spontaneous demonstrations and disturbances increased daily in number and intensity. They were broken up promptly and firmly, but equally swiftly and firmly crowds gathered and came into conflict with the military and the police. Their attacks were directed particularly against what were regarded as the symbols of British rule, such as police and railway stations, railroads and bridges, and post and telegraph offices. The disturbances affected most the vitally strategic areas of Bihar and the United Provinces. Bengal and Assam were completely isolated for some time from the rest of India. The troops defending the frontiers were cut off from their principal sources of supply and reinforcement, and the war industries were severed from the coalfields of Bihar. By the end of August the situation was in hand; but isolated acts of sabotage and destruction, and the distribution of inflammatory bulletins continued until the end of the year. A number of policemen and soldiers lost their lives in the fight, and casualties among the insurgents were heavy. About a thousand were killed; over sixty thousand were arrested by the end of 1942; thousands more defied the police and went underground for many months. The cost of the damage done was estimated at over ten million rupees. Gradually, however, the situation was brought under control, Churchill expressing his satisfaction that the disturbances were crushed 'with the weight of the Government'.

The Congress held the Government responsible for the holocaust: even before Gandhi had given the signal for revolt arrests had taken place, provoking the disturbances. Before giving the signal to strike, Gandhi had looked forward to an interview with his friend the Viceroy to find a way out. The rising was spontaneous, following the arrest of the leaders. There was no evidence to show that the Congress authorities had completed their plans for the struggle or issued specific

directions for a general insurrection; moreover, the resistance to be offered was to be non-violent in character. On the other hand it might be charged that the lesson of previous non-violent struggles that had ended in violence, murder and arson, should not have been so lightly forgotten. Further, that although the civil disobedience campaign followed the arrests without specific guidance or direction from the acknowledged leader, the rebellion was not altogether unpremeditated or unplanned. A large number of Congressmen directed and took part in it, and even after it was suppressed some of them went underground and continued the struggle. Gandhi was justified in declaring that he had 'not any conviction of error'; but the pathetic fact was that he remained unconscious of the error he did commit in forgetting the experience of previous non-violent campaigns launched by him, thereby exposing himself to the charge of rating political strategy higher than faith in the ultimate prospect of India's freedom.

'Fire Raging in Me' is the title of one of the chapters of Tendulkar's biography¹ of Gandhi. The smoke emitted by the fire raging fiercely within him throughout the year 1942 enveloped his whole being, clouded his vision, and impaired for the time being his faculty of reason. He could not, honestly, realize (although his sympathizers and friends did their best to make him realize) that the campaign on which he had determined to embark could scarcely be expected to make, as he believed, any appreciable contribution to human freedom, or that it was likely to seriously imperil the freedom and safety not only of India but of the world. Many of his friends and admirers did not see eye to eye with him on this issue. They feared he was riding for a fall, but they could not avert the catastrophe.

¹ *Mahatma*, vol. vi.

Towards Co-operation

ONCE more the policy of non-co-operation had failed to advance the cause of independence, and once more a campaign of non-violent resistance had ended in violence. Had a spirit of vendetta seized the rulers, a policy of repression would have been relentlessly pursued, but despite recurring disturbances they remained true to their pledges to promote constitutional advance, though in their own way and according to their own ideas of parliamentary methods. Thanks to the sagacity of the new liberal-minded Viceroy, Lord Wavell, the prison doors were again thrown open and the Congress leaders were led to set their feet on the path of co-operation. The grievous blunders made on both sides were forgotten and a new era of responsive co-operation was inaugurated. It was manifest to all that the new Viceroy had undertaken not to set up a military régime but to carry into effect the policy to which the British Government was pledged — the gradual transfer of power to Indian hands.

By the end of 1943 there was, contrary to Congress expectations, a change for the better in the military situation. The tide of victory was turning in favour of the Western Allies. The initiative in Asia as well as in Europe was now in their hands. Britain had survived the worst blows of her enemies, and with the back of the Congress revolt broken, she had nothing to fear from Congress hostility. There was no compelling need to placate the Congress and its inveterate leader: in fact, according to his biographer, Tendulkar, Gandhi had come to the conclusion that he would be kept under detention for 'many more years to come'.¹ The death of his beloved wife, however, on 22 February 1944, drew the day of his release nearer than could have been expected by even the most optimistic student

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 293.

of the political situation in India at that moment. A little before her death Gandhi had addressed a letter to Lord Wavell, declaring that he and his colleagues were wholly innocent of the charges laid against them. The 'Quit India' slogan, he observed, had merely given vivid expression to India's demand for freedom. It certainly had not the sinister motive attributed to it by the previous Viceroy and the Government of India. Replying, the Viceroy expressed his sympathy with Gandhi in his bereavement, and enclosed a copy of his address to the Central Legislature on 17 February 1944, embodying his views on the political situation as it appeared to him.

Speaking frankly and bluntly, as he had been taught to speak as a soldier, Wavell admitted in his conciliatory address that although the winning of the war was the first task of the British Government, it must not exclude preparation for the future. To plan India's political future in any detail was a difficult problem. He could honestly state, however, what he knew to be the desire of the British people and the British Government: it was to see a prosperous and united India enjoying complete and unqualified self-government as a willing partner in the British Commonwealth. He regretted that it was not possible to release the Congress leaders then in detention until there was some indication of their willingness to co-operate in the great tasks that lay ahead. One of those tasks was to get an authoritative body of Indians to conduct a preliminary examination of the constitutional problems. The Government would be ready, he said, to give such a body every assistance it might desire in carrying out its task and arriving at an acceptable solution. 'You cannot alter geography,' he added. 'India is a natural unit.' It was for Indians to decide, he observed, how the two great communities, the important minorities and the princely states should live peacefully within that unit and make the best use of its 'resources and opportunities'. He reminded his audience that with natural geographical units elsewhere—in Britain, in Canada and in Switzerland—peoples of different nationalities, of different races, faiths and cultures, had continued to live together peacefully. Ireland, on the other hand, had a sort of 'Pakistan', but it was an exception. There was a

wealth of precedents for Indian constitutionalists to study, and any authoritative body that was set up to hammer out a settlement could count on any help it might need from the Government. As soon as a new constitution had been formed and brought into operation, the final transfer of power could be made. In the meantime, the country's government must continue to be 'a joint British and Indian affair, with the ultimate responsibility remaining with the British Parliament, though exercised through a predominantly Indian executive'.

Lord Linlithgow had also endeavoured with great patience to enlist the co-operation of the Congress not only in the war effort but also in the settlement of the Indian political problem. After the 'Quit India' imbroglio, however, his feelings became so greatly embittered that he resolutely turned his back on the Congress. Wavell was prepared to let bygones be bygones. The Congress had, in his opinion, made a grievous blunder; this did not however prevent him from recognizing the patriotism and high-mindedness of its leaders; nor could he shut his eyes to the fact that defeated, outlawed and crippled though the national organization then was, it was still the dominant force in Indian politics. There was no party to take its place, and Gandhi, even behind prison doors, was still its unchallenged master. 'I recognize how much ability and high-mindedness it contains,' said Wavell, 'but I deplore its present policy and methods as barren and impractical.' He was anxious to have its co-operation in solving the existing and future problems of India, and even if its leaders felt that they could not consent to take part in the government of India, they might still be able to assist in considering future problems. 'But,' he added, 'those responsible for the declaration of 8 August 1942 (the 'Quit India' resolution) cannot be released until the policy of non-co-operation and obstruction has been withdrawn, not in sack-cloth and ashes—that helps no one—but in recognition of a mistaken and unprofitable policy.'

This refreshing view of the political situation opened a new era, an epoch-making era in the history of India. It was a declaration of policy worthy of a soldier-statesman, an erstwhile Commander-in-Chief of India who had won the respect and esteem



The Viceroy's conference, 2 June 1947. From left to right : Vallabhbhai Patel, Sir Eric Mitevill, Acharya Kripalani, Nehru, Lord Ismay, Baldev Singh, Mountbatten, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Sardar Rab Nishtar



of those who had been associated with him as members of the National Defence Council by his liberal outlook and sincerity and singleness of purpose. Gandhi saw in Wavell's address a ray of hope. He was prepared to bury the hatchet, vindicating at the same time the line of action he had previously pursued. Although criticizing the speech and stressing the need for present performance rather than promises for the future, he responded to the Viceroy's gesture and suggested that Wavell might visit Ahmednagar and the Aga Khan Palace, where he and some of his colleagues had been interned, 'in order to probe the hearts of your captives'. Wavell candidly pointed out in reply that he viewed the policy adopted by the Congress as hindering instead of helping the progress of the country towards self-government. Abandonment of the policy of non-co-operation and whole-hearted collaboration with the other political parties in India, and with the British Government in helping India forward in her economic and political programme, would be, he believed, the greatest contribution the Congress party could make towards India's welfare.

These letters, although exchanged in a friendly spirit, showed that Gandhi, while anxious to end the political stalemate, was as yet not in a mood to take the gentle viceregal remonstrance lying down. Co-operation, he said, required equality and mutual trust between the two parties, whereas both were lacking. In contrast, moreover, to the tone of Gandhi's reply in turning down the Viceroy's plea for unity and co-operation, Jinnah was definitely overbearing. The 'Quit India' campaign was a godsend to the Muslim League, whose demand for Pakistan had never before been taken seriously by anyone. After the incarceration of the Congress leaders, however, the League had assumed the status of the only dominant political party in the land, and the growing importance attached to it by the Government augmented considerably Jinnah's influence and bargaining power. The League slogan was 'Divide and Quit'. Whereas 'Quit India' meant leaving the people to fight out between themselves the battle for Pakistan, 'Divide and Quit' meant imposing Pakistan by an arbitrary fiat. Bent on partition, it was inevitable that Jinnah and his followers should reject

the Viceroy's appeal for unity. 'This drawing in of geography without reference to history or psychology,' observed the League's official organ, *Dawn*, 'is a poor compliment to Lord Wavell's gift of statesmanship and helps no one.' Jinnah improved upon this with the accusation that the Viceroy was 'fishing in Congress waters'. He went so far as to declare that the British Government's demand for a unity which it knew to be unobtainable was 'merely a device for maintaining its imperialistic stronghold in India'.

The Congress had itself to thank for Jinnah's newly found importance. Indeed, had it not so lightly resigned the position of vantage it had gained while its ministries were functioning in the provinces, the League could never have been so well buttressed when the Congress was in the wilderness, nor could Jinnah's position have been so strengthened and his prestige so enhanced. How confident the League now was of its bargaining power can be seen from its resolution establishing a Committee of Action to organize Muslim opposition all over India with a view to resisting the imposition of a unitary constitution and preparing for the hardening struggle for the achievement of Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha, on the other hand, demanded preservation of the unity and integrity of the country and the immediate release of the captive Congressmen. The National Liberal Federation took the most sensible decision: to play the role of a peacemaker. It asked the Congress to abandon, in deference to public opinion, the policy which had led to the 'Quit India' campaign, and at the same time appealed to the Government to release the Congress leaders.

The deadlock seemed unbreakable. The Secretary of State reinforced the Viceroy's message of goodwill with his own assurance that the Cripps proposals still remained open 'in all their generous amplitude'. This emphatic declaration, made in the course of a debate in the House of Commons, reflected a consensus of party opinion and was well timed, for the Congress was still distrustful of the sincerity of intention of the rulers. The Cripps offer had been made when the British were facing defeat and disaster. Excepting Rajagopalachari and a handful of his colleagues, not only Congressmen but also mem-

bers of the other political parties considered it not unlikely that victorious Britain would water down the proposals so as to continue her hold on India. 'We shall stand by the proposals,' declared Amery in no uncertain terms, 'in the hour of victory as we did in days of adversity.' Coupled with the Viceroy's statement, this message did much to improve the political situation, and Providence seemed to smile on those who were endeavouring to end the strife. About this time, an attack of malaria had seriously impaired Gandhi's health. The Viceroy thereupon seized the occasion to release him from detention. The author has personal knowledge of the fact that ever since assumption of his office as Viceroy, Wavell had been anxious to know how Gandhi's mind was working and whether he would, if released, open a new chapter of co-operation with the Government.

All eyes were thus turned to the patient convalescing at Juhu. Despite the setback he had sustained during the 'Quit India' campaign, he could still do more than anyone else to end the deadlock. But he gave no sign that on afterthought he regarded the policy pursued by him as unjustifiable; he could only plead that he alone could not do anything to reverse the policy. The resolution of August 1942 could only be withdrawn by the committee which had passed it: he could do nothing until he knew the mind of the Working Committee of the Congress. A few weeks later, however, he wrote to Wavell that he would advise the Committee that, having regard to the altered situation, civil disobedience was no longer practicable and that the Congress ought to co-operate in the war effort on two conditions—the immediate declaration of India's independence and formation of a national government responsible to the Central Assembly and in control of all matters except military operations during the war. This, however, was just the demand that had led to the breakdown of the negotiations with Cripps.

Gandhi's proposals were in no sense constructive. There was nothing therein to serve as even a starting-point for further discussion. The situation still seemed very dismal. There was, however, one ray of hope: he was prepared to find a way out in his own way without insisting on the 'Quit India' demand. Once

more, therefore, the realist among Congressmen, Rajagopalachari, although discredited and disowned, came forward to suggest what appeared to him the only practical course open to the Congress. Rajagopalachari had been firmly of the opinion for some time that there was no escape from some form of partition if a settlement was to be reached with the League as well as with the British Government on the future constitution of the country. Early in 1943 he had drawn up a formula to serve as a basis for settlement between the Congress and the League, which was shown to Gandhi and approved by him in February 1944. Now Rajagopalachari placed it before Jinnah. The terms of the proposed settlement, as published on 10 July, were: (i) the Muslim League to endorse the Indian demand for independence and to co-operate with the Congress in forming a provisional government for the transitional period; (ii) at the end of the war a commission would demarcate those contiguous areas in which the Muslims were in absolute majority, and in those areas a plebiscite of all the inhabitants would decide whether or not they should be separated from Hindustan; (iii) in the event of separation, agreements would be made for defence, commerce, communications and other essential purposes; (iv) these terms to be binding only in case of transfer by Britain of full power and responsibility for the governance of India.

Nothing came of the discussions which followed; but Gandhi opened direct correspondence with Jinnah. On the eve of the 'Quit India' revolt he had written to Jinnah: 'Why should not both you and I approach the great question of communal unity as men determined on finding a common solution?' This letter had gone astray, and Jinnah came to know of it only when its publication was authorized by Gandhi shortly after his release. Jinnah remained silent for a while, but on 9 September the two leaders met. This meeting, between two men in whose hands it was, if they could agree on the basic issues involved, to remove all obstacles to swift and certain attainment of India's independence, caused consternation among some sections of the population. The Hindus in the Punjab and Bengal were aggrieved at the prospect of becoming helpless

minorities in an Islamic state, and the Sikhs were afraid of an agreement being reached over their heads. The Mahasabha leader, V. D. Savarkar, urged that the provinces of India were not the private property of Gandhi and Rajagopalachari, to make a gift of to anyone they liked.

To have obtained the acquiescence of even a few of the Congress leaders to the principle of Pakistan should have been regarded by Jinnah as a great triumph, and he might have made it the basis for negotiations to explore the prospects of further agreement between the two main parties; but he seemed determined to reject all suggestions for a full conference. At the outset he disputed Gandhi's right to speak for the Congress with the same authority he had to speak for the League. The League's claim that the Muslims of India constituted a nation, having the inherent right of self-determination, had not been acknowledged. If the terms offered by Gandhi were accepted, Jinnah said, the boundaries of the Punjab, Bengal and Assam would be mutilated beyond redemption, leaving the Muslims with no more than the husk. After a fortnight's discussion, Jinnah announced that it was not possible to reach an agreement; but he hoped that this would not be the end of their efforts. Gandhi observed that failure to reach agreement was no cause for disappointment: the breakdown should be regarded merely as an adjournment *sine die*.

Meanwhile, the wise Viceroy, who scented disaster in allowing the worsening situation to drift, thought it time once more for His Majesty's Government to intervene with a view to ending the stalemate. In consultation with his advisers, he formulated tentative conclusions which he placed before a conference of the governors of provinces held in August 1944. So long as the British Government was pre-occupied with the momentous problems of the global conflict, he said, it had little time to devote to the settlement of India's political problem. But it appeared to him that in view of the approaching victory, the question of solution of the Indian problem and the fulfilment of the promises made to India would soon have to be taken up. The Defence of India Rules would lapse, elections would be held, and a good deal of constructive work would

have to be done ; and it would, in his opinion, be prudent to provide Indians now with an outlet for their administrative and political energy. He asked the governors present whether they thought the Government should sit back and await events or should make a positive move. Each governor was emphatically of the opinion that failing agreement between the parties concerned an immediate move on the part of the Government was essential. Thereupon Wavell finalized his plan.

The plan contemplated a small conference of the leaders of the principal political parties and communities to discuss the composition of a transitional government consisting of an equal number of Hindus and Muslims, one representative of the scheduled classes and one Sikh, in addition to the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief. It would be for such a transitional government to prosecute the war against Japan, to carry on the government of British India, to consider the composition of the constituent assembly or other body which would draft the constitution and negotiate a treaty with the British Government, and to secure the approval of the leaders of Indian opinion to the constitution proposed. Admittedly involving difficulties and risks, the plan, such as it was, was submitted to the Secretary of State with the comment that the risks of pursuing a policy of inaction were much greater. The Secretary of State, however, felt that until the political parties had come to agreement with regard to the future constitution, tension between them would be increased by a conference such as that proposed, while those classes that had supported the Government loyally in the past and whose co-operation was still essential would be thrown overboard. He therefore suggested an alternative plan which he hoped avoided the objections to which the Viceroy's scheme was exposed. The principal feature of the Secretary of State's plan was to leave the existing Viceroy's Executive Council untouched for the duration of the war. If the Congress and the League declined to participate in a conference to discuss the modified plan, the Council could proceed to work without them. The Viceroy considered such a scheme impracticable: the Congress and the Muslim League could not be by-passed as they held the key to the situation.

Thereupon Amery put forward a proposal which, he conceded, might be considered 'wildly fantastic'. Instead of insisting on Indian agreement as a condition precedent to independence the British Government should grant independence in the fullest sense as a prerequisite to the settlement of the Indian problem. Obviously, India could not be left to chaos; the independence to be conceded could only be given to the government of India as it existed at the time. This conception, as we shall see, was in the near future to take practical shape. 'That Amery was not able to translate his ideas into practice was largely due to environment and the circumstances of the time.'¹

Wavell was, however, most anxious to do something to relieve the tension forthwith. He felt that his views would have a better chance of acceptance by the Cabinet if he wrote directly to Churchill. V. P. Menon, Wavell's Constitutional Adviser, had the privilege of seeing that remarkable document. It was a bold and forthright expression of Wavell's views on the political situation as it existed at the time and stressed the need for 'a change of spirit, a change which would convince the average educated Indian that the British Government was sincere in its intentions and was friendly towards India'.² As Churchill knew, Wavell said, 'he had no axe to grind; he had not sought, nor had he desired his appointment as Viceroy, but since he had been placed in a position of such immense responsibility he was bound to place his views before him without partiality, favour or affection'.³ Simultaneously he wrote to the Secretary of State suggesting practical measures which might convince Indians of a change of spirit on the part of the British Government. These included a declaration by the Prime Minister that His Majesty's Government definitely intended to give India self-government as early as possible; an assurance that the British Government did not intend to repudiate its debt to India; a gift or transfer of shipping to India against sterling balances to help India tide over the transportation problems; a promise of modern ships to the Indian Navy at the end of the war, and the transfer of Indian affairs from the India Office to the

¹ V. P. Menon : *The Transfer of Power in India*, p. 171.

² *ibid.* ³ *ibid.*

Dominion Office. Amery was inclined to support the proposals, and he reaffirmed his willingness to go a long way towards the recognition of India's self-governing status without waiting for a solution of her internal constitutional problems.

The Cabinet, however, thought that the best time to call a conference of political leaders would be after the discussions following the appointment of a 'conciliation committee' to be set up on the initiative of Tej Bahadur Sapru. Sapru's plan had the blessings of Gandhi; Jinnah, however, refused to recognize a non-party conference or its committees. B. R. Ambedkar, the leader of the scheduled classes, was equally unhelpful. Despite discouragement the Sapru Committee went ahead, but its recommendations, including rejection of the demand for Pakistan, failed to relieve the communal tension and made the attitude of the Muslim League even more hostile. While the Sapru Committee was endeavouring to find a way out of the impasse, Wavell suggested in the course of an address (December 1944) to the Associated Chambers of Commerce a faith cure for the solution of India's ills. If he were permitted to assume for the moment the role of medical adviser to political India, his advice would be, he said, that her condition did not call for a serious operation. He would certainly try all other possible remedies first. The 'Quit India' mixture or 'those satyagraha pills' had not done her much good. Leaving off medicines altogether, she might find that she was not so ill as was thought. 'I do not believe,' he said, 'that there are now real differences in principle between India and Britain, or that the communal problem, difficult though it is, is insoluble. . . . Our best hope lies in working together without trying to lay down detailed conditions or to decide everything before we begin work.' Returning to the medical metaphor, the first requirement for a return to health was, in his opinion, a faith cure, a belief in the good intentions of the British people and in their genuine desire for a settlement and for the welfare and self-government of the Indian people. 'I can certainly assure you,' he added, 'that I should not be here if I did not believe in those intentions.' Such an assurance, so solemnly given, to solve what seemed to be the most intractable and insoluble problem should

have carried conviction. Unfortunately, however, the memory of promises repeatedly broken militated fatally against the faith cure.

Wavell then suggested that he should visit London at the end of January 1945 in order to put before the Cabinet his views on the urgency of the proposed conference. Amery, however, thought that, as the Sapru Committee's report was expected in May, Wavell should postpone his visit till June. Wavell nevertheless insisted that he should be allowed to go earlier, as he was anxious to remove all objections to the conference. Reaching London on 23 March, he forthwith commenced his discussions with the Secretary of State and the India Committee. His plan for a conference was generally accepted. He also insisted that the members of the Congress Working Committee still in custody should be released unconditionally, so as to remove the one serious objection to the participation of the Congress in the work of the conference.

With his mission fulfilled, Wavell returned to India on 4 June. On the eve of his departure from England the Secretary of State announced in the House of Commons that the Viceroy had been authorized to make proposals for the composition of an interim government in India. Ten days later, the proposals designed to advance India towards the goal of full self-government were broadcast by Wavell. It was his intention, he announced, to hold a political conference in Simla on 25 June to discuss the formation of a new Executive Council which would be representative of organized political opinion and include equal proportions of caste Hindus and Muslims. Except for the Viceroy, and the Commander-in-Chief holding charge of the war portfolio, it was to be an entirely Indian Council. The portfolio of External Affairs (except for frontier and tribal matters) was to be transferred from the Governor-General to an Indian member of the Council, and fully accredited persons were to be appointed to represent India abroad. In furtherance of this plan a conference of party leaders and provincial premiers and ex-premiers would be called and asked to submit to him lists of names from which he could select the personnel of the new Council. Co-operation at the Centre would

doubtless make possible the resumption of responsible government in the administered provinces on the basis of coalitions of the main parties. These proposals, in the British Government's opinion, embodied 'the utmost progress practicable within the present constitution' and none of them would in any way prejudice or prejudge the essential form of the future permanent constitution or constitutions for India. The announcement ended with an appeal for the creation of an atmosphere of goodwill and mutual confidence. There was, said Wavell, 'something on all sides to forgive and forget'. He himself believed in the future of India and was determined to do his best to further her greatness.

In submitting the proposals to the House of Commons, Amery stated that he commended them as a means not only of breaking the prevailing deadlock but also of promoting a permanent settlement. 'It is the utmost,' he observed, 'that we ourselves can do pending Indian agreement on a final constitutional settlement. We believe, however, that if the offer is accepted, the co-operation of Indian statesmen in facing the many practical and urgent issues of India's needs, may help to bring the hour of agreement nearer.' Lastly, he declared, that though the British Government had ceased to be the coalition it had been since 1940, the new move was not a party move, and this was confirmed by Attlee. Wavell had fully consulted the previous Cabinet, of which the Labour leaders were members, and the proposals represented 'an agreed national offer on the part of this country to the people of India'. Announcing then that the eight members of the Congress Working Committee, including Nehru, who were still in custody, were to be released, Amery gracefully acknowledged that the proposals he had submitted owed everything to the initiative of Wavell, to his deep sympathy with India's aspirations and to his firm belief in India's greatness.

No time was lost in convening the conference at Simla. Gandhi declared that he would go to Simla but would not attend the conference as he represented no party or institution. That was the function of the Congress President or whomsoever he nominated. Thereupon an invitation was sent to Maulana Azad

to represent the Congress. The invitees assembled at the Vice-regal Lodge on 25 June. Opening the conference, Wavell expressed his hope that its outcome would pave the way to a final solution of the complex constitutional problems. 'The statesmanship, wisdom and goodwill of all of us,' he said, 'is here on trial, not merely in the eyes of India but before the whole world.' Until there was an agreed change in the constitution, he would have to be responsible to the British Government for the good government and tranquillity of India, and they would have to accept his leadership. He asked them to believe in him as a sincere friend of India and commended to them as a motto the words engraved on the column, crowned by the star of India, in front of the Viceroy's house in New Delhi, 'In thought, faith; in word, wisdom; in deed, courage; in life, service; so may India be great.'

Hopes ran high for the success of the conference, as the principal political party that had brought about the tragedy of 1942 now seemed bent on reaching an agreement. Rajagopalachari claimed that goodwill and mutual trust between the Congress and the British people had been to a large extent restored. But what was even more essential, Congress-League understanding was still lacking; fear of a Hindu raj still marred the prospects of a *rapprochement* between the two parties. The main difficulty facing the conference was not the measure of power to be accorded to the people of India but its distribution among them. When, at the outset, it was sought to remove this difficulty by conceding that Muslims were to have as many seats in the new Council as caste Hindus, the question arose as to who those Muslims were to be. Until the last moment Jinnah insisted that it was impossible for the League to co-operate unless all five Muslim members of the Council were taken from the League. On this rock the bark of the conference foundered. The Viceroy, who withstood the claim firmly, had to tell Gandhi, on 11 July, that in view of the unwillingness of the League to co-operate, except on its own terms, the conference had failed. It was by no means a matter of surprise to the Congress leader, who remarked that in the circumstances it was necessary for the British to decide between the two irreconcilable parties. The

comment of the Viceroy on this was that an imposed settlement could hardly result in peace or self-government in India: it was manifest that the negotiations failed not because the rulers were still manœuvring to put off the day for the transfer of power but because communal strife rendered it impossible.

At the last session of the conference, on 14 July, the Viceroy publicly accepted full responsibility for the failure of the discussions. He had hoped that his suggestions would give a balanced and efficient Executive Council and that its proposed composition would be acceptable as being reasonably fair to all parties. Disillusioned, he found himself unable to accept the claims of any party in full. 'It is,' he warned, 'of the utmost importance that this effort to secure agreement between the parties and communities should not result in a worsening of the communal feeling. I ask you all to exercise the greatest possible restraint.' Although he had generously taken the blame for the failure of the conference upon himself, Maulana Azad thought it only fair to point out that the blame in fact rested on the shoulders of others. The Viceroy had called the conference, the delegates had accepted his invitation and had assembled. Thereafter the Viceroy had been asked to clarify certain points in the proposals of His Majesty's Government, and he had done so. The conference had then considered the strength and composition of the Executive Council, and was adjourned to enable the parties to arrive at an agreement on these matters. The difficulties of agreement were well known. The Muslim League had claimed the right to nominate all the Muslim members of the Council, which was a position which the Congress could not accept; for by accepting it, it would have reduced itself to a sectarian and Hindu organization, and thrown away the work of a century. This, declared Maulana Azad, was the Congress view, and as a Muslim he agreed with it wholeheartedly. The communal problem had become so acute that the Congress was of the opinion that it could only be solved by some just and final settlement. The British Government could not divest itself of responsibility in that matter. Speaker after speaker then urged that it was now for the Viceroy to decide what to do. Rajagopalachari saw no reason why an interim solution should

be postponed. The Viceroy might get away from communal principles and attempt a short-term solution on a territorial or administrative basis. Rajagopalachari went so far as to say that if it had been known that the whole purpose of the conference was to get Jinnah to agree to the Viceroy's proposals, failing which it would have to disperse, the Congress would have at once told the Viceroy that it would be a waste of energy.

Wavell has been criticized by some critics for allowing the League to place its veto on the progress of the whole of India. It is even held that if, irrespective of the League, he had proceeded to form a new Executive Council on the basis he had outlined, the history of India might have taken a different turn. These critics who would have welcomed the imposition of an award appear, however, to have given little thought to the fact that Britain and the allied nations were still in the thick of a devastating war and that it would have been impossible for the British Government, even had the Viceroy suggested it, to entertain any proposal for the formation of an Executive Council which excluded 90 million Muslims who had, unlike the Congress, refrained from doing anything to thwart the war effort and had sent thousands of their brave sons to the battlefields of Europe and Asia to fight shoulder to shoulder with the allied forces. Wavell's policy was the policy of the British Government. Moreover, there was much to be said in favour of the view, consistently expressed by Amery as Secretary of State, that without general agreement on a long-term plan the Congress and the League could not get together, and that even if they had been brought together they could not have worked peacefully or cordially. Wavell was, therefore, making one attempt after another to discover a basis on which the two hostile parties could be expected, with any degree of certainty, to work peacefully together; and this was why he insisted that both sides must be consenting parties to the arrangements proposed. Thereby he was exposing himself to the charge of procrastination, of leaning sometimes towards one party and sometimes towards the other. But even though it seemed that the bark of his vicerealty might founder on the rock of hesitation and over-cautiousness, he was anxious till the last moment not

to do anything whereby that of India might be wrecked in the tempest of a civil war.

In his memoirs of this period¹ Maulana Azad bears eloquent testimony to Wavell's frankness and sincerity. Some Congress leaders have criticized Wavell as a failure, a well-meaning man playing into the hands of prejudiced and hostile civil servants. Azad's testimony opportunely does justice to the memory of a simple and sincere statesman who strove his best for the good of India and the fair name of Britain. 'I saw,' says the Maulana, 'that his attitude was not that of a politician but of a soldier. He spoke frankly and directly and came to the point without any attempt at beating about the bush. It struck me that his approach was very different from that of Stafford Cripps. Cripps had tried to present his proposals in as favourable a light as possible. He highlighted the strong points and tried to slur over the difficulties. Lord Wavell made no attempt at embellishment, and he certainly was not trying to make an impression.'²

The political outlook changed swiftly after the breakdown of the Simla Conference. The general election in Britain resulted in a sweeping victory for the Labour Party, giving it a clear majority in the House of Commons. Clement Attlee became Prime Minister in place of Winston Churchill. The first atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, on 6 August 1945, hastened the expected surrender of Japan. Victory over Japan enabled the Government to go ahead with its measures for political progress in India, and on 21 August two important announcements were made by the Viceroy: elections to the central and provincial assemblies were to be held in the next cold weather, and the Viceroy intended to pay a visit to England for consultation with His Majesty's Government. On the third day after these announcements, Wavell was on his way to London. The decisions arrived at after the discussions were embodied in an announcement made by the Viceroy on behalf of the British Government on 19 September. His Majesty's Government earnestly hoped that after the elections to the legislatures, central

¹ *India Wins Freedom*, which appeared when the manuscript of this book was in the hands of the publishers.

² *India Wins Freedom*, p. 107.

and provincial, which had been so long postponed owing to the war, ministerial responsibility would be accepted by political leaders in all provinces. In the meantime, a constitution-making body would be convened. During the preparatory stages the government of India must be carried on, and urgent economic and social problems dealt with. India had to play her full part in the evolution of the new world order. The Viceroy had therefore been authorized to take steps, soon after the results of the provincial elections were published, to bring into being an Executive Council which was likely to have the support of the main political parties in India.

Wavell said that His Majesty's Government was determined to go ahead. Elections were necessary to know the will of the Indian electorate, and after the elections discussions would be held with the Indian leaders and the representatives of the Indian states to determine the composition of the constitution-making body. This appeared to be the best way to give India an opportunity of deciding her destiny. In a message broadcast on the same day, Attlee as Prime Minister gave an assurance that the British Government would not try to introduce into the treaty which would have to be concluded between Great Britain and India any matter incompatible with the interests of India.

The two warring parties in India were, however, still adamant in adhering to their hostile attitude. Each was, nevertheless, prepared to fight the elections to establish its strength. The Congress wanted to demonstrate the will of the people on the issue of the immediate transfer of power. The Muslim League was confident that the verdict of the electorate would be in favour of the demand for Pakistan and would establish its title to represent all the Muslims in the country. The Congress answer to this was that it would have no more discussions with the League and would contact and reassure the Muslim masses direct concerning their interests.

The elections ended in the overwhelming success of the Congress in the general constituencies. The Muslim League captured every Muslim seat. Of 102 seats the Congress secured 57; the Muslim League 30; Independents 5; Akali Sikhs 2,

and Europeans 8. Both major parties had reason to be jubilant. The Congress claim to be the most representative and the strongest was amply vindicated, and the League celebrated 11 January 1946 as the day of its victory in winning all the Muslims seats in the Central Assembly.

An episode in the history of India's war effort which created a great sensation about this time was the trial of certain Indian soldiers who had joined the Japanese and become prisoners of war in Malaya and Hongkong, having constituted themselves into an 'Indian National Army' under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. Over 20,000 of its members had been rounded up and repatriated to India at the termination of hostilities. The story of their defection was kept a secret for a long time; but when, after the end of the war, authentic evidence showed that certain officers of the so-called National Army had been guilty of great brutality in coercing loyal units to join them, the army authorities in India proposed that they should be tried publicly in Delhi. The first batch on trial consisted of a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh. Hailing the accused as patriots, the Congress set up a panel of defence consisting of Bhulabhai Desai, Tej Bahadur Sapru and Nehru. The popular sentiment in favour of the accused caused such ferment that, although they were convicted, the sentences of almost all of them were remitted.

Some time before the trial the Commander-in-Chief, General Auchinleck, had with the concurrence of Lord Wavell as Viceroy brought before the National Defence Council a few of the ill-treated soldiers who had refused to join Bose's National Army. They related to the Council harrowing tales of the atrocious conduct of the National Army officers towards the units of their own regiments. The evidence was so convincing that it seemed to not a few members of the Council that, while the atmosphere was so tense and anti-British feeling so strong, it would be a mistake to allow them public trial. Nevertheless, to show a generous impulse by giving the accused a fair chance to defend themselves had much to commend it, and the majority of the Council thought that such a gesture on the part of the army authorities might perhaps serve to relieve the tension between the people and the Government. The members who

thought otherwise discreetly refrained from striking a discordant note. As it turned out, however, the trial bewildered the authorities by leading to the glorification of the accused and engendering considerable ill-feeling and disorder amongst the public. All in all it served to worsen the already heated political situation.

The British Government regarded as a matter of great urgency the question of setting up a constitution-making body by which Indians could decide their own future. To this end it was thought helpful for some Members of Parliament to meet Indian leaders in order to learn their views at first hand and bring to them in person the general desire of the British public that India should speedily attain her rightful position as an independent partner state in the Commonwealth. Accordingly it was announced that His Majesty's Government proposed to send out to India as soon as possible a parliamentary delegation drawn from all parties, under the auspices of the Empire Parliamentary Association. This was followed by a New Year broadcast message from the new Secretary of State, Pethick-Lawrence. It was because 1946 was expected to be a crucial year in India's history, he said, that he felt that he would like to speak to the people personally. He wanted Indians to realize that the British Government and the whole British people earnestly desired to see India rise quickly to the full and free status of an equal partner in the British Commonwealth. There was no longer any need for denunciations or organized pressure to secure recognition of India's due position in the world. The problem was a practical one : it was to work out a rational and acceptable plan of action, a plan under which authority could be transferred to wider forms of government acceptable to the broad mass of India's people, so that the new India would not be torn and rent by internal strife and dissensions. 'If we all bend our minds and wills to this high endeavour,' he said in conclusion, 'we can do something in 1946 for the greatness of India, and for the future peace and prosperity of Asia and the world.'

Thus thoughtfully heralded, the parliamentary delegation arrived in India on 11 January, led by Professor Robert Richards, a member of the Labour Party with previous experience as

Under-Secretary of State for India in 1924. The delegates came as individuals. They were not empowered in any way to act on behalf of the British Government, but their impressions, said the Secretary of State in a letter to the presidents of the Congress and the Muslim League, would, of course, be passed on by them to ministers and others in Parliament. During its stay in India of about a month, the delegation was received cordially everywhere. Its members had friendly discussions with almost all the important political leaders. Jinnah made it quite clear to them that he would take no part in an interim government without a previous declaration accepting the principle of Pakistan and parity with all other parties. Nehru conceded that the British Government might have to declare for Pakistan but said that there would have to be a plebiscite in the border districts to confirm it. In a farewell talk to press representatives the leader of the delegation gave the public a glimpse of the impressions gathered by the delegates during their stay. The fact that they were in India at the time of the general elections had enabled them to gauge something of the feeling on the one great question about which every party was united. 'There are deep divisions among you,' Richards said, 'but those divisions disappear in the unity with which you, in my opinion, very rightly demand a measure of self-government at this time. There are several views on that particular question, but I do say that we are all conscious of the fact that India has at last attained political manhood; and it will be the privilege of the Government in England, I hope, to extend and further that confidence which India has in herself and in her ability to take her place among the free nations of the world.'

Addressing the newly elected Central Legislature on 28 January, the Viceroy reiterated the determination of the British Government to establish an Executive Council consisting of leaders representing all interests, and a constitution-making body or convention. His speech carried conviction with the Congress leaders; Jinnah, however, insisted on acceptance of the principle of Pakistan. A Muslim revolt throughout India was his prognostication of the result of convening a single constitution-making body, as intended by the British Govern-

ment. Undeterred by the threat, the Viceroy went ahead. His analysis of the political situation was that the Congress commanded the support of almost all educated Hindus. Generally speaking, there was no organized opposition to it among Hindus and nothing to put in its place if it were suppressed; the scheduled classes were divided and many of them supported the Congress; the only real opposition came from the Muslim League. The Viceroy was prepared to tell the League that the Government would feel impelled to go ahead without it, if it remained obdurate. With or without the League Wavell was determined to go ahead; but instead of proceeding immediately to secure a reasonably efficient Executive Council, with representatives of the principal political parties on a proportional basis, as proposed by the Viceroy, the British Government considered it preferable to send a mission of Cabinet ministers to India to conduct, in association with the Viceroy, fresh negotiations with the Indian leaders. Scenting danger in delay, Wavell sounded the warning that the Mission would have to stay in India until a satisfactory decision had been reached. If such a high-grade mission were to return empty-handed to England, it would leave behind the worst possible impression.

On 19 February, simultaneous announcements were made in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords that in view of the paramount importance, not only to India and to the British Commonwealth but to the peace of the world, of the successful outcome of discussions with leaders of public opinion in India, it was decided to send to India a special mission consisting of three Cabinet ministers to seek agreement on the principles and procedure relating to the Indian constitutional issue. The ministers constituting the Mission were to be Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State, Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and A. V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty.

The announcement was warmly welcomed by the Congress as a wise decision. Gandhi appealed to the country not to suspect the bona fides of the Mission. Jinnah still entertained hopes of convincing the Mission that the division of India into Pakistan and Hindustan was the only solution of the problem.

But the temperature of 1945, Attlee had observed in the House of Commons, was not that of 1920, 1930 or even 1942. His colleagues were going to India determined to help her attain freedom as speedily as possible. 'We are mindful of the rights of the minorities,' said he, 'and the minorities should be able to live free from fear. On the other hand we cannot allow a minority to place their veto on the advance of the majority.'

There was in this declaration a change in tone and approach which seemed to suggest that India was now well set on the road to freedom. Who, however, could be sure of what the outcome would be?

Britain Ready: India Unprepared

THE Cabinet Mission soon found that the tug-of-war between the Congress and the Muslim League had created such ill-feeling that it seemed impossible to get them to agree even on the fundamental issues of national unity and the preservation of peace. All discussions proved infructuous, and the Mission had no alternative but to issue a statement embodying proposals of its own for setting up an interim government forthwith, drawn from the major parties, to carry on the administration pending arrangements whereby the conflicting parties could be brought together. Its proposals contemplated a short-term plan for an interim government and a long-term plan for a union of India, embracing both British India and the states, dealing with foreign affairs, defence and communications, and having authority to raise the finances for these subjects. All other powers were to vest in the provinces. In addition, the provinces were to have the right to form groups, each group being empowered to set up its own executive and legislature. The states were to retain all powers other than those ceded to the Union.

The Congress and the League both concurred in the long-term plan (although they viewed it, particularly the provision enabling the provinces to form groups, with different interpretations, as was to be seen later); but both had objections to the short-term plan, for the composition of the interim government, on which they held widely divergent views. The gulf between them could not be bridged, until the Viceroy suggested, as the best possible arrangement to meet the Muslim League demand for adequate representation, that the proposed Executive Council should consist of thirteen members: six Congressmen, including a member of the scheduled classes, five Muslim League members, and two representatives of the minorities.

Without committing himself in any way Jinnah undertook to place the suggestion before the Working Committee of the League for consideration, subject however to the condition that the Congress first agreed. The Congress was in no mood to oblige the leader of the League. Thus, baffled in every attempt at a solution of the deadlock, the Mission issued on 16 May a statement of its own proposals for the composition of the interim government. It proposed to set up an Executive Council of fourteen members, six belonging to the Congress, including a representative of the scheduled classes, five to the Muslim League, one Sikh, one Indian Christian and one Parsi. Should the two major parties, or either one of them, be willing to join, the Viceroy would proceed with the task of forming an interim government which would be as representative as possible. The Working Committee of the Congress rejected the proposals, whereupon the Mission informed Jinnah that the scheme had fallen through and that it was proposed to set up as soon as possible a coalition government including both parties.

It was necessary for various reasons to have a short interval before proceeding with further negotiations. During the interval the existing Council lost some of its members by resignation, and the Viceroy considered it necessary to set up a caretaker government, consisting of officials, to function until such time as negotiations with the political leaders could be resumed. 'You have chosen to go back on your pledged word,' said Jinnah to the Viceroy. He had been confident that Wavell would, on the basis of a previous assurance, proceed with the formation of an interim government without the Congress. The Viceroy had, however, to disappoint the League for the same reason that had constrained him before to disoblige the Congress, namely, that without agreement between the two parties it was hopeless to expect peaceful co-operation. As, however, he had to shift his ground, keeping in mind the ultimate end, to ensure harmonious progress, he exposed himself to charges of bad faith from both sides. London, however, upheld Wavell. It was the verdict of the Cabinet that Jinnah had 'no monopoly of Muslim appointments'.

The Mission left on 29 June. The hard toil of three months

ungrudgingly spent in India during the hottest time of the year had not produced the desired result : no agreement had been reached on the future constitution of India. But the labour was not altogether lost, for during the conversations and debates that had taken place many misunderstandings and doubts concerning the intentions and policy of the British Government had been cleared. It was now beyond doubt that India had no longer to strive to wrest power from an alien government manœuvring to cling to power until the last moment. Britain was prepared to withdraw ; but to whom could she hand over the administration of this vast sub-continent torn by strife ? Her latest endeavour had proved abortive, and it was now for the people of India to agree among themselves how to take over power and how to share it for the benefit of all and for the good government, contentment, harmony and glory of their country.

The Congress lost no time in getting the Working Committee's resolution, accepting the Cabinet Mission's long-term plan, ratified. At a session of the All-India Congress Committee, held on 6 July 1946, Nehru, who had by this time taken over from Maulana Azad the presidentship of the Congress, said that so far as he could see it was not a question of acceptance of a plan, long or short : it was merely a question of deciding for the moment to enter the Constituent Assembly. So long as they considered it advisable in the interests of the country they would remain inside, but it would be open to them to come out if they had reason to fear it would be injurious to the Congress cause to continue its co-operation. A few reservations in Nehru's speech, regarding factors limiting the sovereignty of the Constituent Assembly, and replies given to press representatives to the effect that the Congress regarded itself free to modify the Cabinet Mission plan as it thought best gave the Muslim League an excuse to condemn his statements as a complete repudiation of the basic form upon which the long-term plan rested. A resolution was passed authorizing the Working Committee of the League to draw up a plan of 'direct action', and members of the League were called upon to renounce all titles received from the Government. 'What we have done

today is the most historic act in our history,' said Jinnah, who by this time seemed to have had not the least doubt that it was he and the League, not the British nor the Congress, that held the key to the solution of the deadlock created mainly by his intransigence. 'Never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by constitutional methods. . . . This day we bid goodbye to constitutional methods.' Throughout the fateful negotiations with the Cabinet Mission, he declared, the British and the Congress had each held a pistol in their hand, the one of authority and arms and the other of mass struggle and non-co-operation. 'Today,' he said, 'we have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it.' With such confidence in the League's power to defy the British Government and the Congress combined, the Working Committee of the League called upon Muslims throughout India to observe 16 August as 'Direct Action Day'.

Meanwhile, on 25 July, the results of the elections to the Constituent Assembly were announced. Of the 296 seats assigned to the British India provinces, the Congress captured all the general seats except nine. The Muslim League won 73 seats out of 78 allotted to the Muslims. Though the Congress was in a majority over all other parties combined, the Viceroy was reluctant to constitute an interim government dominated by one party. In view, however, of the obstructive attitude of the League and the critical political situation created by an alarming increase in communal tension as a result of the League's call for 'direct action' and widespread labour unrest, emphasizing the urgent need for representative central government, he had no option left but to form a ministry from the strongest political party. Nehru was therefore invited to make proposals for the formation of an interim government. Having obtained the consent of the Working Committee to negotiate with the Viceroy, Nehru informed Wavell that he was prepared to undertake the responsibility of forming a provisional national government. The Congress had in mind a government consisting of representatives of the main elements in India, and would have welcomed the formation of a coalition government, but in view of the League's attitude it was impossible to secure its

co-operation at that stage. A communiqué was accordingly issued on 12 August, by the Viceroy, regarding his invitation to the President of the Congress to form the provisional government and its acceptance. At the same time Wavell informed the League that, whenever it agreed to co-operate, five seats would be at the disposal of its President.

On the day following the announcement, Nehru approached Jinnah for co-operation. They had a long discussion, but it proved futile; the Muslims observed 16 August as 'Direct Action Day' to protest against the 'great betrayal'. Processions were taken out and protest meetings held in almost all the big towns. Violent speeches were made, intensifying communal bitterness and preaching defiance of law and authority. The Premier of Bengal, Shaheed Suhrawardy, proclaimed that if the Congress was put into power, it would result in the declaration by Bengal of complete independence and the setting up of a parallel government having no connexion with the Centre. In Calcutta there were communal riots on an unprecedented scale, in which hooligan elements indulged in a terrible orgy of violence, arson, plunder and murder. Retaliation by Hindus resulted in further bloodshed in the rural districts of Bengal and Bihar. Troops were called out to restore order.

On 24 August a press communiqué was issued stating that the King had accepted the resignations of the existing members of the Governor-General's Executive Council and that in their places the following were appointed: Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, M. Asaf Ali, Rajagopalachari, Jagjivan Ram, Syed Ali Zaheer and Cooverji Hormusji Bhabha. Two more Muslim members were to be appointed later. Immediately after the announcement the Viceroy flew to Calcutta to acquaint himself with the state of affairs in that city then in eruption. What he saw and heard convinced him that unless the strife between the Congress and the League were ended, there would be further outrages all over India. Returning to Delhi, he felt he must see Gandhi and Nehru forthwith. The only way, he told them on 27 August, to avoid similar trouble throughout the country was to set up a coalition government both in

Bengal and at the Centre. The formula which he suggested for satisfying the Muslim League was not acceptable to the Congress : in its opinion it was not the way of peace ; it would encourage further intimidation and violence. To the Viceroy, however, it was a question of practical politics. What he had witnessed in Calcutta made him fear that the process of constitution-making would be held up and that administration in many parts of India would be paralysed if the Congress remained in power without the League's participation in the government. The British Government, while agreeing that another determined effort should be made to bring the two sides together, felt that the Viceroy should not take any action likely to result in a breach with the Congress. It was essential that the interim government should take office at once. If the Congress could be persuaded to agree to a postponement until October of the summoning of the Constituent Assembly, there would be time for further discussion and agreement. If not, His Majesty's Government was willing to consider the proposal that Nehru, Jinnah and the Viceroy should be invited to England for discussions.

The Interim Government was sworn in on 2 September. On the very eve of its assumption of office, Shafaat Ahmad Khan, one of the newly appointed Muslim members, was assassinated, and simultaneously there were communal clashes in Bombay and Ahmedabad. The Viceroy's fears had come true. 'We are not yet in the midst of a civil war,' exclaimed Gandhi, the country's apostle of non-violence, 'but we are nearing it.' Nehru now rose splendidly to the occasion. He immediately responded to the Viceroy's exhortation to do his best to induce the League to bury the hatchet. The Congress representatives would go to the Constituent Assembly, he said, with the fixed determination of having a common basis of agreement on all controversial issues. Inviting those who differed from him and his colleagues to enter the Constituent Assembly as equals and partners with them, with no binding commitments, he observed that it might well be that when they had met and faced common tasks, the difficulties which then confronted them would fade away. Jinnah retorted : 'You cannot butter parsnips with words. I

have been stabbed, and kind words will not stop the bleeding.' If the British Government were to invite him to go to London to start a new series of conferences on an equal footing with other negotiators he would be glad to oblige those who offered to him the olive branch.

Bent on establishing a coalition government, Wavell continued his efforts to bring Muslim and Hindu together. In a letter dated 4 October Nehru told him that the Cabinet must necessarily function together. If any procedure were adopted which would encourage separate groups to function separately, it would seriously militate against the whole conception of cabinet government which he and his colleagues were endeavouring to evolve. The Viceroy agreed. He was himself most anxious that the Cabinet should work as a team. At last, on 13 October, Jinnah wrote to the Viceroy that in the interests of Muslims and other communities it would be fatal to leave the entire field of administration of the Central Government in the hands of the Congress. In view of this and 'other very weighty grounds and reasons', the League had decided to nominate five members on behalf of the Muslim League. These were Liaquat Ali Khan, I. I. Chundrigar, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Ghazanfar Ali Khan, and Jogendra Nath Mandal, who belonged to the scheduled castes. On 15 October a press communiqué announced that the Muslim League had decided to join the Interim Government, that in order to make it possible to reform the Cabinet three members had resigned, and that His Majesty the King had been pleased to appoint the five nominees of the Muslim League to be members of the Interim Government.

The League entered the Interim Government with the sole undisguised object of ensuring that the Congress did not consolidate its position to the detriment of the League. There was no hope of peaceful co-operation from an organization obsessed with the 'two-nation' theory, although it knew as well as others that, save for a small number, the Muslims in India were mainly Hindus converted to Islam. They were descendants of parents born and bred in India and had lived peacefully with Hindus for centuries, having the same cultural traditions, customs and way of life. In fact, Hindu-Muslim tensions only developed as

a result of the Morley-Minto reforms, which gave Muslims a separate electorate.

A deadlock seemed inevitable. But the remarkably calm, patient and persevering Viceroy was hoping against hope that once the League joined the Government, the tension would be relieved and that by working together the two parties would arrive at some understanding and feeling of co-operation conducive to peace. The League, however, continued to pursue its campaign of 'direct action'. It was amazing to find one section of the Cabinet encouraging, in order to harm the other, defiance of law and order, non-payment of taxes, boycott of Hindus and the formation of Muslim 'national guards'. No wonder that the League's entry into the Interim Government coincided with an outbreak of large-scale disturbances in several districts of East Bengal. The events in East Bengal, said two of the League's nominees to the Interim Government, were but part of the all-India battle for Pakistan. The battle indeed raged furiously both inside and outside the Government, and in the Constituent Assembly, until the Viceroy, the Secretary of State for India and the British Government had exhausted all their energy and resource in attempting to bring about agreement. The Interim Government, declared Liaquat Ali Khan, consisted of a Congress bloc and a Muslim bloc, each functioning under separate leadership.

The happenings in East Bengal resulted in reprisals by the Hindus in places widely separated. Jinnah complained of 'ruthless massacres of Muslims' in various parts of Bihar and urged the Viceroy to postpone *sine die* the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly, for which the 9th of December had been provisionally fixed. He insisted that it would be a mistake to call the Constituent Assembly, and warned the authorities of terrible disasters. The Viceroy failed to see how he could postpone the meeting. Obviously everything rested ultimately on agreement between the two parties, and the right course for the League to follow was to see what it could accomplish within the Assembly to get its Congress colleagues to come to an agreement. If it could not get satisfaction by consultation and co-operation, it was open to it to walk out. It had a guarantee that

the provinces could meet in sections. It was impossible for the Government to dictate to the Assembly any rule or method of procedure. All that it could do was to refuse to recognize a constitution which had not been arrived at in consonance with the essential requirements of the scheme approved by both parties. The alternative to agreement was civil war. Jinnah nevertheless contended that a settlement was impossible. If the British had made up their minds to withdraw, they should go forthwith or else make an award giving the Muslims 'their own bit of country, however small it might be, and they would live there, if necessary, on one meal a day'.

The possibility of open war between the two parties, if the Constituent Assembly were convened on the fixed day, could not be ignored; but for the Government to go back on its declared policy and to delay further the implementation of the Cabinet plan was unthinkable. Britain could not stay on indefinitely waiting for the warring parties to come to terms: the die was cast; and the Viceroy was prepared to face the hazard of it. He informed the Secretary of State that the summoning of the Constituent Assembly might precipitate an outbreak of the long-dreaded civil war but that nevertheless he did not think it was possible to delay the Assembly further without changing their policy. On 20 November therefore he issued invitations for the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. 'One more blunder,' exclaimed Jinnah, 'of a very grave and serious character.' The Viceroy, he said, was playing into the hands of the Congress and appeasing it. He asked the representatives of the League not to participate. The Viceroy thereupon told Liaquat Ali Khan that he could not agree to the representatives of the League remaining in the Interim Government unless the League accepted the long-term plan. The League's members were ready to resign, Liaquat Ali Khan replied, whenever the Viceroy asked them to do so.

In view of the League's stubbornness, Wavell felt that it was impossible to make any headway. For the first time during his career he seemed to waver. Although accused by Jinnah of playing into the hands of the Congress and of putting the Muslims gradually under Hindu rule, although suspected by the

Congress of leaning towards the League and of encouraging minorities to look to the British Government for support and to thwart the Cabinet plan, although suspected of acquiescing in an alleged British plan to exploit the situation created by the deadlock, he had throughout been endeavouring to be scrupulously fair to both sides. His sole desire was to see the Cabinet plan implemented and India placed securely on the path of peaceful, constitutional progress; but he feared that unless the League could be induced to climb down India would head rapidly towards complete anarchy.

A proposal already put forward but rejected by the Congress was that the sections should have the right to take decisions by a majority. The Congress now agreed to enter into sections but would not commit itself on the method of voting inside the sections. The British Government had laid down in the statement of 25 May 1946 that the parties should enter into sections and that it would be for the sections to draft provincial and group constitutions if it was decided to form groups. The Congress had declared that it did not intend to avail itself of its majority and make the Constituent Assembly an arena of conflict. Any imposition on procedure by the Government would be resented by the only party that could claim to work the new Constitution, whether the League joined it or not, and should it on account of any such imposition feel impelled to resign from the Centre, the situation would be worsened. It seemed that to surrender to the point of view of either party would precipitate civil war with its unpredictable concomitants of unrest and the break-up of both the Indian Army and the civil administration.

Round and round, round and round, and Wavell found himself just where he had been before. Further effort to find a way out of the deadlock seemed futile. When thus embarrassed on previous occasions, he had hesitated to act as there was still some hope of further negotiations. Now, however, there seemed to be no possibility of any successful reconciliation of the two parties. It seemed that the time to act had arrived. While he was thus wavering, the Secretary of State thought that one more effort should be made to bring about a settlement, even though

it might end in disappointment. He suggested to the Viceroy that two representatives of the Congress and two of the League be invited to London to discuss with His Majesty's Government how best the meeting of the Constituent Assembly on 9 December could be made effective. The Viceroy suggested that a representative of the Sikhs should also be invited. Invitations were issued accordingly. With the consent of his colleagues, Nehru informed the Viceroy that the invitation to London appeared to reopen the whole problem which had been settled to a material extent by the Cabinet Mission. The visit of Congress representatives to London would be interpreted to mean that, at the instance of the League, the Cabinet Mission's plan was going to be abandoned or substantially modified with the concurrence of the Congress. It would suggest that they had given in to the League's intransigence and threats of violence. In these circumstances the Congress could not accept the invitation, but would welcome consultations with the British Government's representatives in India. Prime Minister Attlee lost no time in sending a personal message to Nehru, explaining that the object of the proposed talks was to ensure the successful holding of the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. There was no intention of abandoning the decision to summon the Assembly, nor was it intended to abandon the Cabinet Mission's plan. On the contrary, it was the earnest desire of all the members of his Cabinet to see that the scheme was implemented in full. All of them, added Attlee, had asked him individually and collectively to urge upon Nehru the supreme importance of this opportunity of discussing the existing situation personally before any untoward event took place in India. In deference to this pressing appeal, Nehru consented to go to London. Vallabhbhai Patel, who was to have accompanied Nehru, was unwilling to go. Jinnah, who was then in Karachi, had also expressed his inability to join, but on receiving from the good-hearted Premier a personal message, exhorting him to go, he agreed.¹

Nehru, Baldev Singh, Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, accompanied by the Viceroy, reached London on 2 December. There

¹ V. P. Menon, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-9.

were animated discussions and consultations ; but on 6 December the British Government announced that no settlement had been reached. 'The Cabinet Mission have throughout maintained the view that the decisions of the sections should, in the absence of agreement to the contrary, be taken by a simple majority vote of the representatives in the sections.' The statement went on to say that legal advice taken by the Government confirmed that the Mission's statement of 16 May meant what it had always stated was its intention. This interpretation had been accepted by the Muslim League, but the Congress had put forward a different view. It had asserted that the true meaning of the statement, read as a whole, was that the provinces had a right to decide both as to groupings and as to their own constitutions. The British Government conceded that other questions of interpretation of the statement might arise. It was hoped that if the Council of the Muslim League agreed to participate in the Constituent Assembly, they would also agree, as had the Congress, that the Federal Court should be asked to decide matters of interpretation that might be referred to it by either side, and would accept such decision so that the procedure both in the Union Constituent Assembly and the sections might accord with the Cabinet Mission's plan. His Majesty's Government urged the Congress to accept the view of the Cabinet Mission ; but if, in spite of the reaffirmation of the Mission's intention, the Constituent Assembly desired that the fundamental point should be referred for decision to the Federal Court, such reference should be made at a very early date. 'There has never been any prospect of success for the Constituent Assembly,' it was added, 'except on this basis of an agreed procedure. Should a constitution come to be framed by a Constituent Assembly in which a large section of the Indian population had not been represented, His Majesty's Government could not of course contemplate—as the Congress have stated they would not contemplate—forcing such a constitution upon any unwilling parts of the country.'

'What would be the position,' inquired Jinnah, when the statement was read to the Indian leaders before publication, 'if the decision of the Federal Court on the matter immediately

in dispute was contrary to the British Government's interpretation?' The Secretary of State said in reply: 'They would in that case have to consider the position afresh.'

Nehru and Baldev Singh did not conceal their dissatisfaction. The British Government's statement was tantamount to a variation and extension of the statement of 16 May, and would entail reconsideration of the whole situation. Baldev Singh stated that the position of the Sikhs was worsened by the statement and that the Sikhs might be compelled to withdraw from the Constituent Assembly if the Federal Court ruled that the British Government's interpretation of the Cabinet Mission's statement was correct.

The Constituent Assembly met on 9 December, without the Muslim League's representatives. Dr Rajendra Prasad was unanimously elected President of the Assembly. Nehru moved the most important resolution of the session, envisaging the Indian Union as an independent sovereign republic consisting of autonomous units with residuary powers 'wherein the ideals of social, political and economic democracy would be guaranteed to all sections of the people and adequate safeguards would be provided for minorities and backward communities and areas'. It was a 'declaration, a pledge and an undertaking before the world', he observed, 'a contract with millions of Indians and therefore in the nature of an oath which we must keep'. He fervently asked the House to rise above group and party politics. M. R. Jayakar, the seasoned Liberal statesman and an acknowledged ambassador of peace, thoughtfully moved an amendment to the effect that the discussion of the resolution be postponed to a later date so as to keep the door open to representatives not only of the Muslim League but also of the Indian states to participate in the proceedings of the Assembly. The amendment, intended to dispel the League's fear of a Hindu raj, was accepted, and the Assembly was adjourned to 20 January 1947, with an expression by the President of the hope that members of the League would join the Assembly by the time the resolution came up for discussion at the next session.

The League, however, seemed determined to hold aloof and wreck the whole plan of the Cabinet Mission. The catastrophe

that Wavell had tried his best to avert seemed imminent. The work of the Constituent Assembly might go on, but, without the co-operation of the League, could it draw up a constitution for India acceptable and workable as a whole? The League not only refused to join the Constituent Assembly but was also committed to a policy of direct action and active opposition to the government of which it formed a part. To end this anomalous position, the Congress and minority members demanded the resignation of the representatives of the League from the Interim Government. To implement the Cabinet Mission plan was the main purpose of the Interim Government: how could those who rejected it continue to be members of that government? On behalf of the League, Liaquat Ali Khan contended that even the Congress had not in fact accepted the Cabinet Mission plan. If the British Government held that the Congress had accepted it, the League would reconsider its position. In that case, however, he said, the British Government would have to ensure that the Congress did not go off the rails laid down by the Mission for the Constituent Assembly. In fact the League was urging that neither the Congress, which had not wholly accepted the Mission's statement of 16 May, nor the Sikhs, who had rejected it, had greater right to representation in the Government than had the League. The Viceroy therefore suggested, as the last slender chance of persuading the League to enter the Constituent Assembly, that His Majesty's Government might issue a statement calling upon the Congress to confirm that certain passages in its resolution dealing with the sections and groupings were not intended to qualify the Congress acceptance of the Mission plan; but the Secretary of State was doubtful whether such a statement, if issued, could ease the situation.

Meanwhile the Congress leaders declared their intention to withdraw from the Interim Government if the League representatives were allowed to remain in it. The British Government was thus impaled on the horns of a dilemma. To demand the resignation of League members would inflame Muslims not only in India but in the other Muslim countries of the world. To drive the Congress out of the Government would have even more disastrous consequences in India itself, for in such

chaotic conditions even the loyalty of the army and the civil service could scarcely be relied on. The British Government was ready to go, but the Indian leaders were not in a position to take over power. How long could the British wait? They considered it advisable to fix a definite date for their withdrawal, with a view to bringing home to the people the urgency of putting their house in order. Thus, on 20 February, Attlee announced in Parliament the Government's intention of effecting a peaceful transfer of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948. It was proposed to make over the British Government's responsibility to duly constituted authorities in accordance with the Cabinet Mission plan. Should it appear however that, by June 1948, no such authorities were established under a constitution approved by all parties, the British Government would have to consider to whom they should transfer the powers of the Central Government, whether as a whole to some form of central government for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial governments, or in such other way as might seem most reasonable and in the best interests of the Indian people.

Simultaneously, a surprise was sprung by the announcement that Lord Wavell would be succeeded as Viceroy in March 1947 by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, on whom would devolve the task of 'transferring to Indian hands responsibility for the government of British India' in a manner that would best ensure the future happiness and prosperity of India. By way of explanation of the abrupt termination of Wavell's viceroyalty, it was stated that his appointment was a war-time one and that the opening of a new and final phase in India was the appropriate time to terminate it. With a tribute to the outgoing Viceroy for the devotion and high sense of duty with which he had discharged the onerous duties of his high office during the most difficult period in India's history, and the announcement of an earldom conferred on him, a veil was drawn over the mysterious happenings that had led to the decision to drop, in the midst of the tempest then raging and convulsing the people, the seasoned pilot who had been endeavouring to steer the ship of the State clear of Scylla on the one hand and Charyb-

dis on the other. The veil can only be lifted when documentary evidence is available concerning the brief but eventful, sagacious and tactful administration of the country during his term of office. True, he failed to implement the Government's declared policy of handing over power to Indian hands. True also that the Prime Minister had reason to feel that as Wavell could not make any headway due to his anxiety to avert an explosion, someone else should attempt it before the situation worsened and resulted in another and perhaps a worse explosion. The question that arises is whether the consequences of further delay would have been more disastrous than the partition of the country and its aftermath. Supposing Wavell's hesitation had led to a catastrophe, such as was feared, could it not have been controlled with the might of the British? Would it in its ultimate effect have been more harmful than the abrupt withdrawal of British power resulting as it did in the division of the country and the slaughter, ruination and exile of thousands upon thousands of people? Would Attlee have been wiser to fall back on Britain's military might to suppress the expected civil war than to find another Viceroy to pull out according to plan, leaving the fighting factions to settle their own differences? These questions can only be answered when more light is thrown on the situation as it existed at the time.

With remarkable equanimity and magnanimity, Wavell, the soldier-scholar-statesman, went about his mission of peace as though nothing had been said or done to reflect on his administration nor a hair of his head injured. The very day following the British Government's announcement he saw Nehru and once more urged him to get the Muslim League into the Constituent Assembly. He saw Liaquat Ali Khan on the same day and reiterated his considered opinion that it would be in the interests of the League and the country generally if it entered the Constituent Assembly and argued out its case on the floor of the Assembly. Liaquat Ali Khan, however, repeated his firm conviction that there was no prospect of the two parties ever getting together. The statement of His Majesty's Government, urged the Viceroy, was a challenge to Indian statesmanship.

Hindus and Muslims had to live together peacefully in India: on what terms they could do so it was now for them to decide without British intervention, advice or support. The results of the decisions they took would demonstrate their capacity for self-government.

Nehru now rose to his full stature. In publicly welcoming the British Government's decision he stated that the clear and definite declaration for the transfer of power not only removed all misconception and suspicion, but also brought reality and 'a certain dynamic quality' to the existing situation in India. 'That decision,' he said, 'will undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences and puts a burden and responsibility on all concerned. It is a challenge to all of us and we shall try to meet it bravely in the spirit of that challenge. I trust that we shall all endeavour to get out of the ruts and end the internal conflicts that have frustrated our efforts and delayed our advance, and accept this burden and responsibility, keeping only the independence and advancement of India in view.' Jinnah, however, sulenly refused to comment on the statement beyond declaring that the Muslim League would not yield an inch in its demand for Pakistan.

In the British Parliament the statement had a mixed reception. In the House of Lords, Conservatives such as Viscount Templewood protested that the British Government's decision was likely to imperil the peace and prosperity of India. It was, he declared, 'an unconditional surrender at the expense of many to whom we have given specific pledges for generations past'. Lord Simon went a step further and said that the decision taken was 'going to degrade the British name'. A Daniel, however, came to judgment in the person of Lord Halifax. With such knowledge as he had, he was not prepared to say that, whatever else might be right or wrong, this step taken by His Majesty's Government must on all counts be judged to be wrong. 'The truth is,' he pointed out, 'that for India today there is no solution that is not fraught with the gravest objection, with the gravest danger. And the conclusion that I reach — with all that can be said against it — is that I am not prepared to condemn what His Majesty's Government are doing unless I can honestly and

confidently recommend a better solution. . . . I should be sorry if the only message from the House to India at this moment was one of condemnation, based on what I must fully recognize are very natural feelings of failure, frustration and foreboding.' The Secretary of State, in winding up the debate, observed that the only alternative to the policy of the Labour Government was 'to start all over again the unhappy procedure of arrest and imprisonment without trial, so coming into conflict with a rapidly growing and determined body of people of India.'

In the House of Commons, the Conservative Opposition Members thundered that the decision was a 'gamble', 'an unjustifiable gamble'. Winston Churchill, unsurpassed in biting sarcasm, excelled himself on this occasion. 'In handing over the Government of India to these so-called political classes,' he declared, 'we are handing over to men of straw of whom in a few years no trace will remain. . . . Many have defended Britain against their foes, none can defend her against herself. But at least, let us not add—by shameful flight, by a premature hurried scuttle—at least, let us not add to the pangs of sorrow so many of us feel, the taint and smear of shame.' Winding up the debate, Attlee clinched the issue when he pointed out that 'the dangers of delay, the dangers of hanging on, were as great as the dangers of going forward'. The new Viceroy was sent on a mission not of betrayal on their part, as had been suggested, but of fulfilment.

The Congress submits to Partition

THE situation continued to cause the utmost concern to the retiring Viceroy. To the anxiety of intensified communal street fighting and rioting was added the worry of food shortage, rising prices and strikes. The economic difficulties were fully exploited by the Communists for their own ends. Nevertheless, the political situation showed signs of improvement despite the British Government's final statement and appeal. The Working Committee of the Congress welcomed the statement and reiterated its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's plan and the British Government's interpretation of it. Welcoming also the decision of a number of Indian states to join the Constituent Assembly, it invited the members of the Muslim League elected to the Assembly to take their seats and co-operate with the Congress in taking over power from the British.

In a letter to the Viceroy, dated 9 March, Nehru stated that the Congress wanted to do everything in its power to get the League's representatives into the Constituent Assembly. Should it nevertheless decline to join, the Congress would try to lay down a course of action avoiding friction. It was with this object in view that the Congress had suggested the division of the Punjab into two parts—not a pleasant situation to contemplate but preferable to any attempt by one party to impose its will on the other. The Viceroy undertook to forward the Congress resolution to the Secretary of State. The best chance for the peaceful progress of India lay in the whole-hearted acceptance by both parties of the Cabinet Mission plan. Wavell sincerely believed that there could be no better solution of the Indian problem. But by the time of his departure from India, on 23 March, there was no sign of any positive move in that direction.

In his reminiscences Maulana Azad refers in touching terms to the disappearance of Wavell from the scene. After the Quit

India campaign Linlithgow had put the Indian problem into cold storage, and, recalls Azad, it was Wavell who 'opened the closed door' and convened the leaders to the Simla Conference to resolve the deadlock. Azad had gone to the Conference in a mood of suspicion and distrust but had returned deeply impressed by the transparent sincerity of the soldier-statesman which touched his heart. 'Nor can I forget,' he says, 'that the credit for the changed atmosphere in Indo-British relations today must be traced back to the step which he so courageously took in June 1945.' Although the Simla Conference was not successful, everything that followed, says Maulana, was 'a logical development of the courageous step which he took'.¹

On assuming office Mountbatten had conversations with Gandhi and Jinnah who thereupon issued a joint appeal for peace. In it they deplored the acts of violence and lawlessness that had disgraced India and inflicted the greatest misery on innocent people, and called upon all communities not only to refrain from acts of violence and disorder but also to avoid any incitement to breach of peace.

In his very first interview with the new Viceroy, Gandhi suggested that the existing Cabinet should be dissolved and that Jinnah be given the option of forming a new one. The selection of its members should be left to him. They might be all Muslims, or all non-Muslims, or be representatives of all the elements of the population. If Jinnah accepted the offer, the Congress would guarantee to co-operate freely and sincerely provided all the measures that the Cabinet brought forward were in the interests of the Indian people as a whole. The sole referee who would decide what was, or was not, in the interests of India as a whole would be Lord Mountbatten in his personal capacity. Jinnah should, for his part, undertake on behalf of the League or of any other parties represented in the Cabinet that they would do their utmost to preserve peace throughout India. There should be no Muslim 'national guards', or any other form of private army. Within these limits, Jinnah would be perfectly at liberty to plan for Pakistan

¹ *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80.

and even to put his plans into effect before the transfer of power, provided that he was successful in appealing to reason and did not use force. If Jinnah refused, the same offer should be made *mutatis mutandis* to the Congress. Apart from the difficulties inherent in this proposal, it was unacceptable to Gandhi's own associates. He therefore told Mountbatten that his suggestion did not have the support of his colleagues and that all further negotiations would be carried on by the Working Committee. The Viceroy, however, pressed him to stay on and use his good offices in favour of acceptance of the Cabinet Mission plan by both sides.

Attlee's directive to the new Viceroy was that he should endeavour to have a settlement reached on the basis of a unitary government for British India and the Indian states, within the British Commonwealth if possible, through the medium of a Constituent Assembly set up in consonance with the Cabinet Mission plan. Should he find that there was no possibility of such a settlement, he should report what steps should be taken to hand over power on the due date. He was further told to impress upon the Indian political leaders the importance of avoiding a break in the continuity of the Indian Army and the need for close collaboration with the British Government for the security of the Indian Ocean.

After his talks with the party leaders, Mountbatten discovered that he was up against a stone wall. The same obstacles that had thwarted the efforts of his predecessor in office stood in his way. Disillusioned at the very commencement of his fateful mission, he felt convinced that there was not an iota of a chance of his achieving what Wavell, with unflagging patience and perseverance, had endeavoured unsuccessfully to accomplish. An alternative plan for the transfer of power had, therefore, to be found as quickly as possible in order to save the country from civil war. According to the statement of 20 February it was now for His Majesty's Government to consider to whom power in British India should be handed over on the due date, whether as a whole to some form of central government for British India, or in some areas to the existing provincial governments, or in such other way as might seem most reasonable and in the best

interests of the Indian people. Not a minute was lost. Mountbatten drew up forthwith, in consultation with his advisers, the outline of a plan. No solution other than partition was likely to induce the leader of the Muslim League to negotiate for peace. Accordingly Mountbatten's plan was based on the delegation of authority to the provinces or to such confederation of provinces as might agree to group themselves in the intervening period before the actual transfer of power. It was contemplated that the members of the legislative assemblies of Bengal and the Punjab should meet separately in two parts: (i) representatives of predominantly Muslim areas, and (ii) representatives of predominantly non-Muslim areas. If both sections in either of these assemblies voted for partition, that province would be partitioned. The plan further provided that in the event of the partition of Bengal, the predominantly Muslim district of Sylhet in Assam would have the option of joining the Muslim province. It also envisaged the holding of an election in the North-West Frontier Province to ascertain the wishes of the people of that province.

In proceeding with his plan Mountbatten counted upon the acquiescence of the Congress despite Gandhi's strong abhorrence of the concept of partition. In a published memoir, Pyarelal, Gandhi's secretary at this time, throws light on the genesis of the sudden transformation in the policy of the Congress leaders concerning the expediency of partition: 'A gradual change had been coming for some time over the mind of the Congress High Command, particularly under the impact of Lord Wavell's plan for the transfer of power. The salient feature of that plan was transfer of power province-wise, with dissolution of the existing Centre.'¹ It was feared that Wavell's plan would lead to an accentuation of internal disruption and chaos. Slowly the pendulum began to swing in favour of letting the Muslim League provinces form themselves into a separate state, which in any event could not have been prevented, while demanding a division of the Punjab and Bengal.

The Congress Working Committee passed a resolution in the first week of March 1947, for the partition of the Punjab into

¹ *Mahatma Gandhi — The Last Phase*, vol. II, p. 83.

Muslim-majority and Hindu-majority zones. Gandhi was not consulted in taking this vital decision. The bewildered leader, whose advice on matters of such importance had previously always been sought, asked for clarification of what was intended. Patel said in reply that nothing had been done in a hurry, and Nehru submitted that it was the only answer to partition as demanded by Jinnah. 'I feel convinced,' he observed, 'that we must press for this immediate decision so that reality might be brought into the picture.'

The political situation was worsening day by day : communal frenzy and bitterness were growing, and the machinery of administration was creaking to a halt. It was felt, not only by Mountbatten but by the Congress leaders, that if the demand for Pakistan was not acceded to, India might be split into several Pakistans. By the middle of April Mountbatten was ready to discuss with the governors of the provinces the broad outlines of his plan.

These discussions revealed strong views against the partition of the provinces. Even if the colossal administrative difficulties involved in a transfer of power based on partition were brushed aside, even if it were assumed that partition was inevitable in order to placate the Muslim League, how was partition to be brought about? Consent of the parties concerned was a *sine qua non* : how was it to be obtained? While Jinnah on the one hand was insisting on his proposal for a province-wise Pakistan, the Congress was equally insistent that no constitution for a part of the Union should be forced upon unwilling minorities within it. 'The Muslim League can have Pakistan if they wish,' said Nehru, 'but on condition that they do not take away other parts of India which do not wish to join Pakistan.' But if Mountbatten entertained any hope that his plan might be acceptable to Jinnah as the first instalment of Pakistan, he was greatly mistaken. On the contrary, Jinnah condemned the proposal for the partition of Bengal and Punjab as 'a sinister move actuated by spite and bitterness'. The Muslims should have a national home and a national state in their homelands comprising the six provinces : the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind, Baluchistan, Bengal and Assam. If the Punjab

and Bengal were partitioned, all the other provinces would have to be divided in a similar way.

The situation brooked no delay. The man of action charged with the duty of arranging for an orderly withdrawal before June 1948 felt he had to do something to hasten the transfer of power, if not to a united India, to a divided India, even though it might mean, in Gandhi's words, leaving 'a legacy of chaos behind'. This would perhaps, he seemed to believe, be a lesser evil than the fratricidal war apprehended by Wavell, into which the neighbouring Muslim countries might be dragged, involving the mutilation and ruin of the whole country. He therefore sent his plan forthwith to the Secretary of State for the consideration of the Cabinet. Thus did Mountbatten come to decide unhesitatingly to do what his predecessor in office refrained from doing in the hope of finding an agreed solution. To do a little wrong in order to achieve a great right, may be a maxim justifiable in exceptional cases. But was it only a little wrong that he was risking or would it turn out to be far too great a wrong to be justified by the good in sight?

Gandhi told the Viceroy and confirmed in a letter (8 May) that 'it would be a blunder of the first magnitude for the British to be a party in any way whatsoever to the division of India'. If it had to come, it should come after the withdrawal of the British as a result of understanding between the parties. Whilst the British Government was functioning in India, it was responsible for the preservation of peace in the country. The machinery of government seemed to be cracking under the strain caused by the error of raising hopes that could not or must not be fulfilled. 'If you are not to leave a legacy of chaos behind,' he wrote, 'you have to make your choice and leave the government of the whole of India including the states to one party.' Not to partition the provinces of the Punjab and Bengal did not mean throwing the minorities to the wolves. In both the provinces the minorities were, he contended, large and powerful enough to arrest and command attention. 'If the popular governments cannot placate them, the Governors should, during the interregnum, actively interfere.'

While Gandhi was thus fighting to preserve the country's

unity, some Hindu and Sikh legislators from the Punjab passed a resolution at a meeting held in Delhi to the effect that the only solution of their political problem lay in an equitable division of the province and that safeguards should be provided for the preservation of the Sikh community. A few of the extremists among the Sikhs also agitated for a separate Sikh state, to be named Khalistan. Elsewhere, a separate Pathan state was demanded for the people of the North-West Frontier Province.

The communal tensions and bickerings, fear and unrest, took a turn for the worse everywhere in the country, justifying the apprehension of the Viceroy that if procedure for the transfer of power was not settled without further delay there would, in some of the provinces, be no authority to whom power could be transferred. The tentative plans were thereupon revised in the light of the Viceroy's discussions with the governors of the provinces and the party leaders, and were forwarded to Lord Listowel, who had succeeded Lord Pethick-Lawrence as Secretary of State, with the request that the Government's approval might be obtained by 10 May. The plan as altered and approved by the British Cabinet was in the Viceroy's hands on 9 May. A press communiqué was issued forthwith, stating that the Viceroy had invited Nehru, Jinnah, Patel, Liaquat Ali Khan and Baldev Singh to meet him on 17 May, when the plan would be presented to them.

The amended plan seemed to the Congress leaders wholly unacceptable, as instead of envisaging a union of India and the states, as originally contemplated, the metamorphosed plan seemed to encourage units to cut adrift from the Union, and the states to stand out. They had reached another impasse. Mountbatten now seemed to favour a plan previously drawn up by V. P. Menon, suggesting partition of the country into two Dominions to whom power could be transferred on the basis of Dominion status. He obtained the consent of the leaders of the Congress, of the League and of the Sikhs to an alternative plan on that basis, and as directed by him Menon prepared some 'Heads of Agreement' bringing out the prominent features of the plan :

(a) That the leaders agree to the procedure laid down for ascertaining the wishes of the people whether there should be a division of India or not ;

(b) That in the event of the decision being taken that there should only be one central authority in India, power should be transferred to the existing Constituent Assembly on a Dominion Status basis ;

(c) That in the event of a decision that there should be two sovereign states in India, the central government of each state should take over power in responsibility to their respective constituent assemblies, again on a Dominion Status basis ;

(d) That the transfer of power in either case should be on the basis of the Government of India Act of 1935, modified to conform to the Dominion Status position ;

(e) That the Governor-General should be common to both the Dominions. . . .

(f) That a Commission should be appointed for the demarcation of boundaries in the event of a decision in favour of partition ;

(g) That the Governors of the provinces should be appointed on the recommendation of the respective central governments ;

(h) In the event of two Dominions coming into being, the Armed Forces in India should be divided between them. The units would be allocated according to the territorial basis of recruitment and would be under the control of the respective governments. In the case of mixed units, the separation and redistribution should be entrusted to a Committee consisting of Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck and the Chiefs of the General Staff of the two Dominions, under the supervision of a Council consisting of the Governor-General and the two Defence Ministers. This Council would automatically cease to exist as soon as the process of division was completed.¹

Having approved the outline of the new plan, the Viceroy was anxious to obtain assurance from the party leaders that they, too, approved of it. Jinnah was non-committal ; but the other leaders signified their approval in writing. Mountbatten then flew to London to discuss the plan with the Prime Minister and the India and Burma Committee of the Cabinet. It was promptly approved, and a statement was drawn up of the policy it was proposed to adopt with the approval of the party leaders. It was stated at the outset that it had always been the

¹ V. P. Menon, *op. cit.*, pp. 365-6.

desire of the British Government that power should be transferred to the Indian people in accordance with their wishes. In the absence of agreement among the Indian political parties the task of evolving a method by which the wishes of the Indian people could be ascertained had devolved on the British Government. It was not the intention of the Government to interrupt the work of the Constituent Assembly; it was hoped that the Muslim League representatives would take their due share in its labours. At the same time, it was clear that any constitution framed by the Assembly could not apply to those parts of the country which were unwilling to accept it. His Majesty's Government was satisfied that the procedure outlined in the statement embodied the best practical method of ascertaining the wishes of the people of such areas on the issue whether their constitution was to be framed (a) in the existing Constituent Assembly, or (b) in a new and separate Constituent Assembly consisting of the representatives of those areas which decided not to participate in the existing Constituent Assembly. It would then be possible to determine the authority or authorities to whom power should be transferred.

Among other things the statement laid down that the provincial legislative assemblies of Bengal and the Punjab (excluding the European members) should meet in two parts, one representing the Muslim-majority districts and the other the rest of the province. The Muslim-majority districts in those provinces were set out in an appendix to the statement. The members of the two parts of each legislative assembly sitting separately would be empowered to vote whether or not the province should be partitioned. If a simple majority of either part decided in favour of partition, arrangements would be made accordingly. In the event of partition being decided upon, each legislative assembly would, on behalf of the areas represented by it, decide whether its constitution should be framed by the existing Constituent Assembly, or by a new and separate one. The statement ended with the following definite announcement :

The major political parties have repeatedly emphasized their desire that there should be the earliest possible transfer of power in India. With this desire His Majesty's Government are in full

sympathy, and they are willing to anticipate the date of June 1948 for the handing over of power by the setting up of an independent Indian Government or Governments at an even earlier date. Accordingly, as the most expeditious, and indeed the only practicable way of meeting this desire, His Majesty's Government propose to introduce legislation during the current session for the transfer of power this year on a Dominion Status basis to one or two successor authorities according to the decisions taken as a result of this announcement. This will be without prejudice to the right of the Indian Constituent Assemblies to decide in due course whether or not the part of India in respect of which they have authority will remain within the British Commonwealth.

Mountbatten returned to India on 31 May, for the new plan was to be presented to the Indian leaders on 2 June. Meanwhile Gandhi was pressing his views in favour of a united India. Rather than submit to the mutilation of the country he would have the Cabinet Mission plan imposed by force on the unwilling sections of the population. He was asked in Calcutta whether, in view of the strained relations between Muslims and Hindus, worsening day after day, it was possible for them to live in unity, as he believed. Gandhi declared emphatically that the enmity between the two communities could not last for ever: in spite of temporary insanity they must live in India and must not sell their freedom for a mess of pottage. The next question was whether there could be an individual Bengal with a divided India? Gandhi replied that there was no question yet of a divided India. If it came to pass, the joint and free will of the Hindu and Muslim population of Bengal would decide which part to join. On 12 May, Suhrawardy (the Bengal Premier) called on Gandhi to plead for a united sovereign Bengal. Gandhi made a sporting offer to him, confirming it in writing. 'I recognize,' he said, 'the seriousness of the position in Bengal in the matter of partition. If you are absolutely sincere in your professions and would disabuse me of all suspicion against you and if you would retain Bengal for the Bengalis—Hindus and Musalmans—intact by non-violent means, I am quite willing to act as your honorary private secretary and live under your roof till the Hindus and Musalmans begin to live as brothers that they are.'

It was feared that after the withdrawal of the British there would be a period of chaos and anarchy. There was cause for apprehension that the nationalists, unless they immediately started learning to defend themselves with firearms, might ultimately find themselves under the heels of the Muslim Leaguers, for, with or without Pakistan, trouble was brewing. A pertinent question put to Gandhi therefore was whether he would modify his theory of *ahimsa* in view of such a contingency, 'for the sake of individual defence'. In reply Gandhi said that the nationalists were not worth the proud name they bore if they feared the Muslim League; and to the next question — 'Can the nationalists exclude the followers of the Muslim League from the sphere of their action?' — he replied: 'I am not thinking of vote-catching devices. I am thinking of the Muslims as Indians, the same as others, needing their care and attention. If the leaders have ceased to believe in *ahimsa*, they should boldly and frankly say so and set about putting their own house in order. For me there is no scope for any change. *Ahimsa* is no mere theory with me; it is a fact of life based on extensive experience.'¹ In short, Gandhi adhered to his opinion and advice. The votary of non-violence could not harbour violence even in thought. If Pakistan was wrong, the partition of Bengal and the Punjab would not make it right.

The day for the announcement of the British Government's decision on the momentous proposal for the division of India was drawing near. Speaking at a prayer meeting on 29 May, Gandhi said that he was not perturbed, as most people were, with the thought of what the fateful decision of 2 June would be. Some correspondents had suggested that he take to forest life unless he was prepared to ask Hindus to 'answer sword with sword and arson with arson'. He could not, however, oblige them by falsifying the mission of his whole life in advocating the acceptance of the law of the brute in place of the law of man. At subsequent gatherings he told his audiences that in a free India only the common man would count. Therefore, in Kashmir, it was not the Maharaja with his soldiery that would count, but the Muslims who were the majority there.

¹ D. G. Tendulkar : *Mahatma*, vol. VII, p. 474.

The same thing applied to the rulers of Hyderabad, Bhopal, Travancore, Baroda and the rest. He fervently hoped that the Hindu and Muslim princes would not take sides, for it would be an evil day if they did. The princes would be well advised to join the Constituent Assembly.

Even as Gandhi was endeavouring to turn the thoughts of politicians and people generally from rivalry for worldly possessions to brotherliness and fellow-feeling, Jinnah was putting forward demand after demand for the acquisition and extension of what he already regarded as his dominion. West and East Pakistan must somehow be linked; he therefore claimed a corridor between the two. Nehru dismissed the demand as 'fantastic and absurd', and there were strong protests from other political leaders. The Viceroy was then in England. On his return to India he advised Jinnah not to overreach himself in his manœuvres to obtain Pakistan. The astute politician thereupon quietly dropped the proposal.

The situation and the outlook for the future, although perplexing, were profoundly interesting. History furnished no parallel. The problem which faced the leaders of the people surpassed in magnitude and intricacy any that seasoned statesmen and politicians in India had ever had to encounter. On the decision that the popular leaders would take on the British Government's statement depended the future political history and progress of India.

On the morning of 1 June, Gandhi woke up earlier than usual. There was still half an hour before the morning prayers. He remained lying in bed, says Pyarelal,¹ musing in a low voice: 'Today I find myself all alone. Even the Sardar (Vallabhbhai Patel) and Jawaharlal think that my reading of the situation is wrong and peace is sure to return if Pakistan is agreed upon. . . . They did not like my telling the Viceroy that even if there was to be partition, it should not be through British intervention or under the British rule. . . . They wonder if I have not deteriorated with age. . . . It may be,' he added, 'all of them are right.'

On 2 June there was held, in a friendly atmosphere at the

¹ *op cit.*, pp. 210-11.

Viceregal House, a small conference of party leaders : Nehru, Patel and J. B. Kripalani, the Congress President, on behalf of the Congress ; Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and Abdur Rab Nishtar on behalf of the League ; and Baldev Singh representing the Sikhs. The object was to apprise the leaders of the Viceroy's conversation in London with the members of the Cabinet and the Opposition on the ways and means of handing over power. Mountbatten observed that from the moment of his arrival in India everybody to whom he had spoken had impressed upon him the urgency of ending the state of political uncertainty that had been causing so much anxiety to them all. He had tried hard to obtain agreement on the Cabinet Mission plan but had to report to His Majesty's Government that the Muslim League had been unable to withdraw its rejection of the plan. The Congress would not agree to the principle of partition, although it had accepted the principle that Muslim-majority areas should not be coerced. On the other hand, Jinnah, who demanded the partition of India, would not agree to the principle of the partition of provinces. The Viceroy had represented to His Majesty's Government the impossibility of fully accepting the demands of one side and not of the other. He had tried to put forward what he believed to be the points of view of both parties on these matters not only to the Cabinet but also to the Opposition, who were broadly in agreement with the policy proposed to be adopted by the Government. The political leaders had impressed upon him that after partition (if it was decided on) the transfer of power should take place with the utmost speed. He had accordingly suggested that the necessary legislation should be rushed through during the parliamentary session. The Prime Minister had agreed, and Churchill had given an assurance that the Opposition would facilitate the passage of the Bill. Power would be demitted in the first instance on the basis of Dominion status. Thereafter, the new Indian government, or governments, would be free to withdraw from the Commonwealth whenever they wished to do so. His Majesty's Government was ready to help both Dominions with British officers for civil administration as well as for defence.¹

¹ V. P. Menon, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-4.

The Indian leaders were asked to study the statement, to discuss it with their respective working committees and to inform Mountbatten of their reaction by midnight. He did not ask that they should agree categorically to the terms of the statement, but he would like to have assurances from both sides that they would do their best to have the arrangements outlined and worked out peacefully. Mountbatten then saw Gandhi, who had been preaching against the proposal for partition. In the end he was able to persuade Gandhi that the plan was the best in the circumstances. The Congress Working Committee resolved to accept it. On behalf of the Sikhs, Baldev Singh accepted the principle of partition as laid down in the plan, but urged that care should be taken to meet their demands when framing the terms of reference for the proposed Boundary Commission. Jinnah would not commit himself in writing, but he assured the Viceroy personally that he would do all in his power to get the plan accepted. At the next session of the conference, on the following day, the Viceroy announced that he had received written assurances from the Congress and the Sikhs and a verbal assurance from the Muslim League with which he was satisfied. Jinnah nodded his assent.

Attlee announced the plan in the House of Commons on the same day. In a broadcast that night he said that partition had become inevitable as the Indian leaders had failed to agree on the Cabinet Mission's plan for a united India. The same evening the Viceroy broadcast over All India Radio. It had always been his firm opinion, he said, that with a reasonable measure of goodwill between the communities a unified India would be by far the best solution, but it had been impossible to obtain agreement on the Cabinet Mission plan or on any other plan that would preserve the unity of India. The Muslim League had demanded the partition of India, and the Congress had used the same argument for demanding, in that event, the partition of certain provinces. The argument seemed unassailable, although he was as much opposed to the division of provinces as he was to that of India. Hence it was left to the people of India themselves to decide the question of partition. It was necessary, in order to ascertain the will of the people of the

Punjab, Bengal and part of Assam, to lay down boundaries between the Muslim-majority and remaining areas, but he wished to make it clear that the ultimate boundaries would be settled by a Boundary Commission and would certainly not be identical with those which had been provisionally adopted. The Sikhs were so distributed that any partition of the Punjab would inevitably divide them.

The proposal which the Viceroy had put forward and which had been accepted, was that His Majesty's Government should hand over power immediately to one or two governments of British India, each having Dominion status. Necessary legislation to give effect to the proposal would have to pass through the British Parliament. It was not the intention of His Majesty's Government to impose any restriction on India as a whole or on the two states, if there were partition, in deciding in the future their relationship to each other and to other member states of the British Commonwealth.

Addressing a press conference on 4 June, Mountbatten laid special stress on the fact that independence through Dominion status was complete and that the different administrations were at liberty to opt out of the Commonwealth whenever they pleased. He then had a meeting with Gandhi. The trend of their conversation was reflected in the words in which Gandhi referred to the inevitable arrangement arrived at, howsoever distressing to him: 'The British Government is not responsible for partition. The Viceroy has no hand in it. In fact he is as opposed to division as Congress itself. But if both of us, Hindus and Muslims, cannot agree on anything else, then the Viceroy is left with no choice.'¹

A discordant note was struck by the Hindu Mahasabha's Working Committee. At a meeting in Delhi it passed a resolution condemning the partition. 'India is one and indivisible,' it urged, 'and there will never be peace unless and until the separated areas are brought back into the Indian Union and made integral parts thereof.' A group of militant Muslims, the Khaksars, staged demonstrations when the All-India Muslim League Council met in Delhi. Nevertheless, the Council,

¹ *ibid.*, p. 382.

although it could not agree to the partition of Bengal and the Punjab, passed a resolution, on 10 June, authorizing Jinnah to accept the fundamental principles of the plan as a compromise. The All-India Congress Committee accepted the plan by a resolution passed on 14 June. In seconding the resolution, moved by Govind Ballabh Pant, Maulana Azad observed: 'The division is only of the map of the country and not in the hearts of the people. I am sure it is going to be a short-lived partition.'

Thus was the plan accepted. Although aggrieved by the turn events had taken, Gandhi thought it necessary to lend his support to the Congress Committee's resolution. 'If at this stage the All-India Congress Committee rejected the Working Committee's decision,' he asked, 'what would the world think of it? The consequences of rejection would be the finding of a new set of leaders who should not only be capable of constituting the Congress Working Committee but also of taking charge of the government.'¹ He had steadfastly opposed partition. But there were moments when one had to endure what could not be helped. This was one such moment. The Congress and its valiant chief had to submit to amputation and accept Mountbatten's plan as the only remedy for a malady that had poisoned the entire body politic, defied all physicians, and remained incurable.

¹ See Pyarelal, *op. cit.*, pp. 251-2.

Exit Britain

INDEPENDENCE for India was achieved not by force but through legislation, a phenomenon unique in the history of mankind. The date fixed was 15 August 1947. Intricate problems had to be faced by the leaders of the people, the Viceroy and his masters in England. Within the two months remaining, momentous decisions had to be taken to implement the plan accepted by the political parties mainly concerned. The wishes of the provinces concerning matters left to their option, particularly those provinces of which the division was proposed, had to be ascertained. The administrative services and armed forces had to be allocated, and assets and liabilities apportioned, between the two Dominions. Boundaries had to be settled. Above all, a neighbourly policy had to be evolved to ensure friendly relations between the religious groups, and a smooth running of the machinery of administration, within each Dominion. The two main sections of the population that had decided to separate had to lay down for themselves policies and programmes. Forgetting the past, they had to live in future as members of one family, divided geographically, but one in spirit and devotion to Mother India.

The legislative assemblies of the provinces met; and the majority decided to join a new Indian Constituent Assembly. East Bengal, West Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province, however, voted in effect for Pakistan. The next step was the introduction of the Indian Independence Bill in the British Parliament. Passed by the House of Commons on 15 July, and by the House of Lords on the following day, it received the royal assent on 18 July. 'This Bill,' said Lord Samuel in the House of Lords, 'is a moral to all future generations. It is a treaty of peace without a war.' Lord Listowel, as Secretary of State for India, stressed in his address to journalists

at the India Office the international aspect of the British gesture : 'There will be a new partnership between the East and the West which will bring healthy results for the whole world.'

After much hesitation and consultation with the British Prime Minister and Opposition leaders, Mountbatten accepted the invitation of the Congress leaders to continue in office as the Governor-General of the Dominion of India. Jinnah expressed to Mountbatten his approval of this appointment. His own appointment as the Governor-General of Pakistan was announced by Attlee in the House of Commons. Pending the ultimate transfer of power it was essential that the Muslim League as well as the Congress should be represented in the Central Government. The Congress, however, had been insisting for some time past that as the League had not accepted the Cabinet Mission plan it was not entitled to representation in the Government. With a view to avoiding the necessity of asking the Muslim League representatives to resign, it was decided to re-allocate portfolios so that the Congress wing of the Cabinet would take charge of affairs pertaining to the Dominion of India while the representatives of the League would handle the corresponding portfolios for Pakistan.

Platform speakers thus found themselves turned administrators overnight. Many, having indulged throughout their political career in destructive criticism, non-co-operation and civil resistance, had no administrative experience. Fortunately the British had left behind an efficient administrative machine and personnel noted for their ability, integrity, knowledge and grasp of administrative problems, enactments, legal opinions, conventions, precedents and traditions. Expert committees consisting of officials representing both India and Pakistan rendered invaluable assistance to the Steering Committee and the Partition Council, covering a thousand and one problems pertaining to administration, organization, records, personnel, assets and liabilities, central revenues, contracts, currency and coinage, future economic relations, domicile and diplomatic relations. They put up recommendations on a large number of subjects and evolved formulas for reaching agreements on un-

settled points. V. P. Menon mentions¹ the names of two such outstanding civil servants—H. M. Patel and Chaudhuri Mahomed Ali, to which should be added one other—V. P. Menon himself.

Both sides insisted that they must have their armed forces under their own control before 15 August. The country's closely knit forces, renowned for their prowess and high traditions of comradeship and common sacrifice, had therefore to be divided into two parts, involving the breaking up of regiments, installations and training institutions. It was agreed that the division should be on the basis of citizenship subject to the stipulation that an opportunity should be given to those who happened to be residents in that part of India in which their community was a minority to transfer their names and citizenship to the other part. Subsequently, the Partition Council decided that from 15 August the Indian Union and Pakistan would each have within its own territories forces under its own operational control, composed predominantly of non-Muslims and Muslims respectively. The withdrawal of British troops, which started on 17 August 1947, was completed on 28 February 1948.

Two boundary commissions had to be set up, one to deal with the partition of Bengal and the separation of Sylhet from Assam, and the other to deal with the partition of the Punjab. With the consent of both parties Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointed Chairman of both commissions. The members were all High Court judges. Both sides put forward conflicting claims concerning the territories that should go to them. As even the members of the commissions could not agree among themselves as regards Bengal and the Punjab, it was agreed that the Chairman should give his own award. His Award satisfied none of the parties. The Hindu press condemned it as self-contradictory, anomalous, arbitrary and unjust to Hindus in Bengal and the Punjab; the Muslim press denounced it as partial to Hindus and complained that Pakistan had been cheated. The Award had, however, to be accepted for the time being, each side reserving the right to seek adjustment by negotiation.

¹ *op. cit.*, pp. 397-8.

Which of the two Dominions should inherit the international privileges and obligations of pre-partition India? The Secretary of State, to whom the question was referred, upheld the contention of the Indian Union that neither variation in the extent of the territory of the State nor change in its constitution could affect its identity. The leaders of the Muslim League were unconvinced, and the question had to be referred to the United Nations for decision. The United Nations held that the situation was that of a part of an existing state breaking off to form a new state, and on this analogy there was no change in the international status of India; it continued as a state with all its treaty rights and obligations, and consequently with all the rights and obligations of membership in the United Nations. The new Dominion of India therefore continued as an original member state of the United Nations. It was open to Pakistan, in order to become a member of the United Nations, to apply for admission.

Since the inhabitants of both Dominions would continue to be British subjects as citizens of two member nations of the British Commonwealth, no change in nationality was called for immediately. As regards passports, too, it was decided that, for some time at least, no restrictions should be imposed on the movement of persons from one Dominion to the other. It was further agreed that the two Dominions should, as far as possible, adopt a common policy in matters affecting Indians abroad so as to enable them to secure racial equality and civic rights.

Thus did the leaders on each side try within the time at their disposal to settle some of the details concerning the process of partition on such friendly terms as could be hoped for, but the masses inflamed for years and indoctrinated with the gospel of spite and hatred could hardly be expected to fraternize simply because it pleased their leaders to bury the hatchet for the time being. The communal situation in the Punjab gave cause for alarm. Mountbatten promptly summoned a meeting of the Partition Council. Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad, on behalf of the future Government of India, and Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan, on behalf of the future Government of Pakistan, were

present, and Baldev Singh attended on behalf of the Sikhs. The Council considered it desirable to issue forthwith (22 July) a statement likely to ease the situation. In the first joint statement of policy thus made by the spokesmen of the two governments it was declared that the members of the Council were determined to establish peaceful conditions in which the process of partition might be completed and the numerous urgent tasks of administration and economic reconstruction taken in hand. Both the Congress and the Muslim League had given assurances of fair and equitable treatment to the minorities. The two future governments reaffirmed these assurances. 'It is,' the statement continued, 'their intention to safeguard the legitimate interests of all citizens irrespective of religion, caste or sex. In the exercise of their normal civic rights all citizens will be regarded as equal, and both the Governments will assure to all people within their territories the exercise of liberties such as freedom of speech, the right to form associations, the right to worship in their own way and the protection of their language and culture. Both the Governments further undertake that there shall be no discrimination against those who before August 15 may have been political opponents.' These guarantees implied that violence would not be tolerated in any form in either territory. In this determination the two governments were emphatically of one mind. To safeguard peace in the Punjab, they agreed to set up a special military command from 1 August, covering several districts. A similar organization was to be set up, if necessary, in Bengal. 'Both governments have pledged themselves,' it was added, 'to accept the awards of the Boundary Commission, whatever these may be.'

This thoughtful declaration had a reassuring effect on the minorities in both Dominions. One looked in it in vain, however, for evidence of mutual consultation, decisions or precautionary measures concerning the anticipated flight of the population from one country to the other. There was no sign of any steps having been taken to prevent panic among the minorities in each Dominion, of any directives to the people to keep calm, or of assurances for the protection of victims of communal intolerance and frenzy. Owing to lack of such pre-

cautions the population of both Dominions suffered a holocaust unprecedented in the annals of any country in the world.

A notable achievement was the integration of the princely states with the new Dominion of India. Under the British Cabinet Mission plan, paramountcy would have lapsed after the new constitution had come into being. Under the plan of 3 June power was to be transferred on 15 August, and paramountcy would therefore lapse on that day. Various discussions and negotiations with the rulers and the states' ministers were started under the guidance and instructions of Vallabhbhai Patel. The whole story has been told by V. P. Menon in his book, *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*. On 15 August the rulers of all the states geographically contiguous to India, with the exception of Kashmir, Hyderabad, Junagadh and other states in Kathiawar under Muslim rulers, signed the Instrument of Association and the Standstill Agreement. India thus became a federation with the provinces and the states as its integral parts.

On 27 August, Jinnah bade farewell to India and flew to Karachi. Once one of the ardent advocates of Home Rule for India and the idol of young nationalists, what good there was in his power to do, with his matchless intellect and spirit of service! How much harm, however, did he inflict on his motherland owing to his exaggerated fear that a Congress raj would imply perpetual domination of Muslim by Hindu politicians! It was most unfortunate that the Congress, when it had opportunities to allay the League's fear, flouted Muslim aspirations, belittled its influence, underrated the strategic position attained by it, to an extent which exasperated Muslim opposition and led to the crystallization of the demand for Pakistan.

The first thing the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan did, when it met on 11 August, was to elect Jinnah its President. Having preached the doctrine of separation for two decades, he now addressed his audience for the first time in terms of unity and human brotherhood. 'You are free,' said he; 'you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing

to do with the fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state. Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal, and you will find that in course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State.' On 14 August Mountbatten also addressed the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. On the next day, he said, the two new sovereign states were to take their place in the Commonwealth, not as young nations but as the heirs of an ancient and proud civilization. The birth of Pakistan was an event in history. 'We who are part of history and are helping to make it,' he observed, 'are not well placed, even if we wished, to moralize on the event, to look back and survey the sequence of the past that led to it. . . . There is no time to look back. There is time only to look forward.'

On the morning of 15 August, Mountbatten was sworn in as Governor-General of India, and the new Cabinet, headed by Nehru, was sworn in by the Governor-General. 'With this transfer of power by consent,' said the King's message read by Mountbatten to the members of the Constituent Assembly, 'comes the fulfilment of a great democratic ideal to which the British and Indian people alike are firmly dedicated.' With the true scholar's sense of justice, the erudite Dr Rajendra Prasad struck the right note in reply: 'While our achievement is in no small measure due to our sufferings and sacrifices, it is also the result of world forces and events, and last, though not least, it is the consummation and fulfilment of the historic traditions and democratic ideals of the British race.'

The joy of the people and their leaders was short-lived. Many frightful events followed in the wake of freedom. The flight for shelter of thousands of panic-stricken people from one country to the other; the violence, arson, loot, murders, rapes and other outbursts of the bestiality which persists in man, lacerated the hearts of many, including Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. Was this the freedom for which he had striven and struggled for more than a generation? Was it the price of independence? The one essential condition for winning free-

dom which he had laid down, was non-violence; but the freedom achieved was accompanied by outrages of the worst type ever witnessed. The story is recent history. The after-effects of the surgical operation have not yet worn off, and it is as yet too early to pronounce on the possibility of reunion.

For Britain, too, it was tragic indeed that instead of leaving the country at the opportune moment, in an atmosphere of goodwill and peace, the British statesmen of the day should in despair have decided to quit the country hurriedly, without the communal harmony essential for the transfer of power. The British withdrawal was bound to come, and could have come earlier, as it was understood that the country could not be held except by consent. The empire was built up during days of disunion, when the population was slumbering, unmindful of political rights and wrongs. When, with the gradual growth of nationalism, for which British-imposed education was responsible, there was a change in the temper of the people, the British lion would have walked out as quietly as he had walked in but for the split in the nationalist camp which came soon after the inauguration of the National Congress. The subsequent prolonged feud between the Muslim League and the Congress made quick withdrawal impossible. The delay at first undoubtedly suited the lion; but Lord Wavell was determined to make, and he did make, strenuous efforts to see the fulfilment of the pledge made early in the nineteenth century, subsequently renewed, and reinforced by solemn declarations during the war. But because Wavell endeavoured to end the strife between the two major political parties simultaneously with the end of British rule, it was not given to him to see, during his viceroyalty, the day of India's independence.

When the last chapter of the British connexion with India has been written, and when a complete picture of the political situation during the closing days of the British era is presented, Wavell's policy will perhaps be fully vindicated. Meanwhile, let not the world forget the loftiness of his motives, the sincerity of his purpose and his patience under adverse circumstances, discouragement and disappointment.

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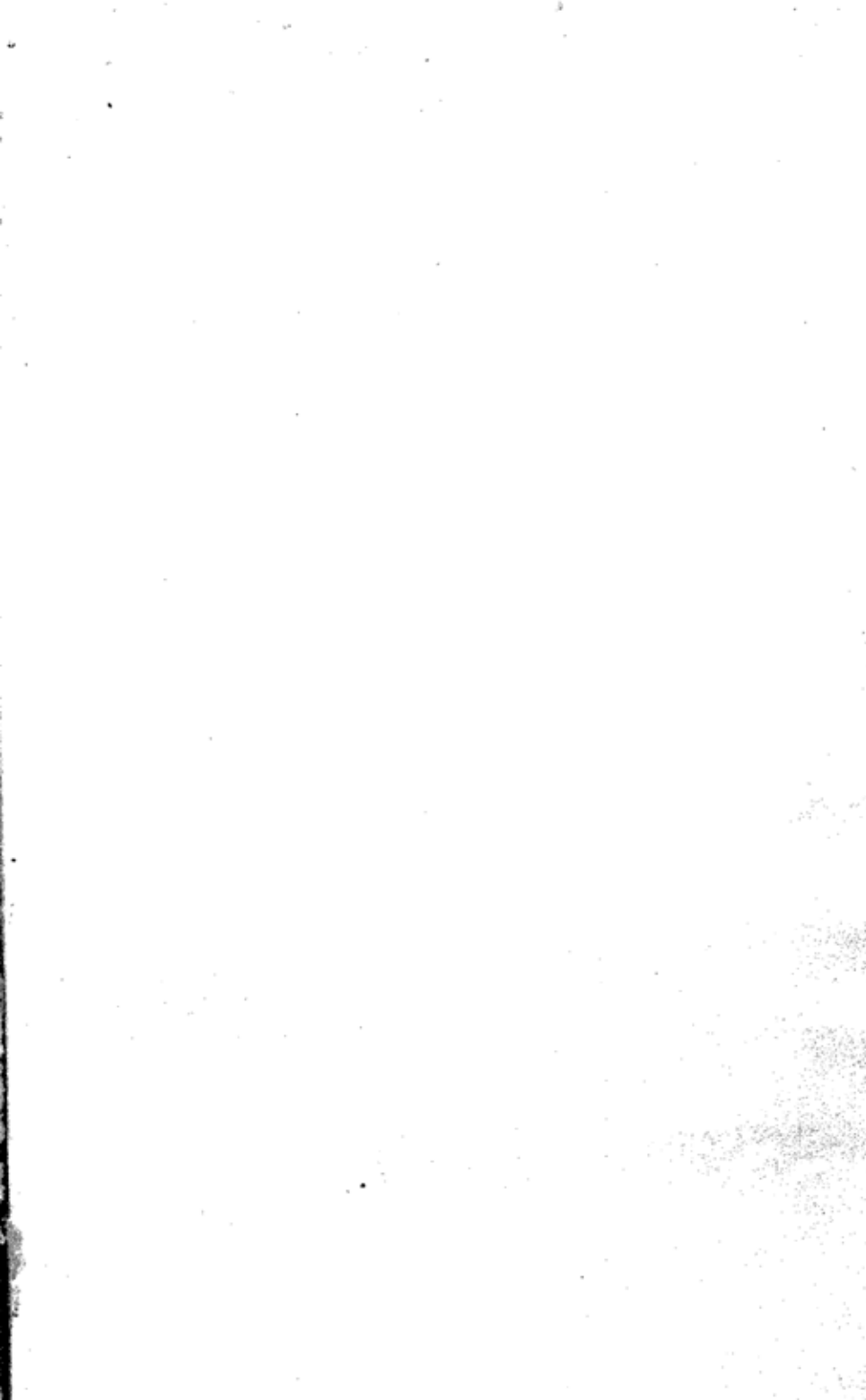
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